

FALL, 1961

ONE DOLLAR

DRAMA SURVEY

H. D. F. KITTO

Oedipus Tyrannus

FRANK W. WADSWORTH

Magnanimous Despair

RICHARD B. VOWLES

*A Half Century of
Scandinavian Drama*

FRANK D. HIRSCHBACH

*New Dimensions in
German Comedy*

HENRY GOODMAN

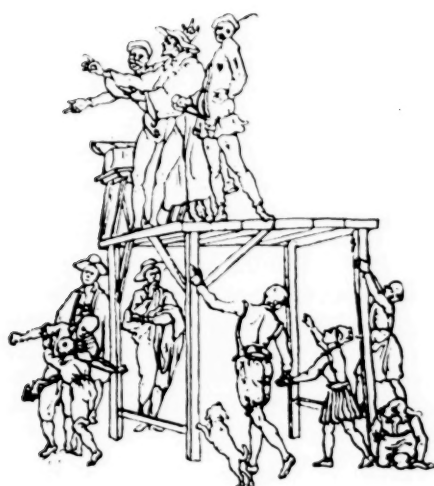
Arnold Wesker

*Theatre Reviews by Gerald Weales,
E. Martin Browne, Max Bluestone,
and L. Cummings.*



A NEW TRANSLATION OF HORACE'S *ARS POETICA*
BY NORMAN J. DEWITT

DRAMA SURVEY



A REVIEW OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE & THE THEATRICAL ARTS

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Our cover illustration, of a tragic actor, is from an ivory figure in the Fillon Collections.

The next issue of DRAMA SURVEY, an illustrated number, will appear in February 1962.

The contents will include:

An article on contemporary Turkish theatre

by Kenneth Macgowan

A review-essay on Norman Bel Geddes' *Miracle in the Evening*

by William Melnitz

A critical study of *The Way of the World*

by Paul T. Nolan

An essay on Jean Genêt

by George Wellwarth

A review-essay on Fry's new play

by E. Martin Browne

A critical study of *Measure for Measure*

By Robert Hethmon

Theatre and book reviews

Contributions, especially those concerned with the more practical aspects of the theatre, are invited and will be paid for if accepted.

Oedipus Tyrannus

by H. D. F. KITTO

(This is a chapter, somewhat condensed, from the new book by Professor Kitto soon to be issued by the University of California Press. In granting their kind permission for DRAMA SURVEY to print this chapter, the University of California Press wish us to make it clear that the book will be a single volume in their Sather Lecture series, and not a miscellany of Professor Kitto's essays.)

It must have befallen many people, not me only, to have been shaken to pieces by a performance, or reading, of this play, and then, in the cold light of the morning after, to wonder what after all it amounts to. To this question different answers have been given. Here is one:¹ the *Tyrannus* is a typical Greek tragedy; it differs from the typical Shakespearian, or Christian, tragedy fundamentally, since, in the Greek play, what shall befall a man is fixed beforehand by an arbitrary Fate, and has no relation to his character or behavior. Oedipus is doomed anyhow; the drama consists only in his struggle to escape from the net from which there is no escape. "Any attempt to explain human fortunes in terms of human behavior, or to establish any relationship between guilt and misfortune, is entirely absent."

It sounds plausible — provided that one takes the precaution of not reading any other of Sophocles' plays; for in them the connection between human fortunes and human behavior is at least as direct as in Shakespeare. But first of all: does it matter? Is it not simply true that the play's the thing? It matters a great deal: this same writer quotes Mr. Ivor Brown as saying, about a production of another Greek play, that a modern audience finds it difficult to maintain interest in "these fate-driven men." Quite so; it is possible so far to misunderstand the significance of a play that it becomes a bore.

For us, the *Tyrannus* is difficult: "for us", not for Sophocles' own audience, because we bring to it all kinds of modern prepossessions which they did not. But is there any reason why this should make the *Tyrannus* difficult, seeing that we find the other six extant plays fairly straightforward? Yes, there is: in at least two respects this play differs notably from the other six — or the other five, if I may pass over the other Oedipus play. In the other plays, human fortunes

are explained in terms of human behavior; and again, though in all of them gods take some part, they do not intervene in order to make things happen which otherwise would not have happened. (The few apparent exceptions at once show themselves, on inspection, to be no more than a natural kind of dramatic shorthand.) In general, the gods are present in human action much as the laws of nature are present in the processes of the physical universe: what the gods do is the reverse of arbitrary: it is the nature of things made manifest.² Yet in the *Tyrannus* Apollo intervenes twice, in the prophecies given first to Laius and then to Oedipus, but for which there would have been, so to speak, no play. It is quite exceptional; therefore challenging.

One more preliminary point. We think, perhaps, that prophecies have a compulsive force: "So-and-so shall happen." But in the *Antigone* Teiresias tells Creon that so-and-so will happen to him because he has angered the gods: it does happen, yet Sophocles takes a lot of trouble to make clear that it happens naturally, without any divine intervention. Why then the prophecy? What is the point? The point is the same as in sundry prophecies in Shakespeare: the prophecy makes us realize that what befalls Creon is not mere bad luck, but the inevitable or natural result of what he himself has done; that in it something like a general law is to be discerned. One such prophecy occurs in the *Tyrannus*. Teiresias tells Oedipus that he will be blind. Oedipus does blind himself. What is more, he says explicitly: "This is Apollo's work." But then he goes on to explain, passionately and at length, why he *had* to do it; as we might say, in our more elegant language, he found it a psychological necessity to destroy his sight. Evidently, we may go wrong if we think of these gods as a remote and irrational Fate, and we may go right if we interpret prophecy as meaning: "So-and-so is going to happen, in the nature of things." But here is the challenge: Why, in this play only, does the action depend on two prophecies which come like a bolt from the blue?

We must not hazily imagine that Sophocles was merely dramatizing the Oedipus legend and doing it rather well. Within certain obvious limits the Greek dramatists always remade the myth, to make it suit their purposes. Out of this legend Aeschylus had made a trilogy, of which only the *Seven against Thebes* has survived: it appears that in his version Laius was warned not to have a son, or it would end his race and imperil the city. Euripides, in his *Phoenissae*, implies much the same, and makes Iocasta say that Laius begat Oedipus "giving way to pleasure and heated by wine." In each case,

Laius was culpable. But our affair is with Sophocles, not with "the Oedipus-myth". Therefore we will first disengage from the play the story, as Sophocles made it; then, having disengaged his raw material, so to speak, we will contemplate the dramatic structure that he built with it. Being a *poet*, a "maker", he made something; what he made, how he made it, ought to show us what ideas controlled the making.

The story, as distinct from the play, begins with Iocasta's account of his birth (vv.711 ff.). I quote it in Jebb's careful translation: "An oracle came to Laius — I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers — that the doom should overtake him to die by the hand of his child who should spring from him and me." Jebb expounds the relative clause as meaning "whoever may be born;" an equally valid translation would be "a son (some son) born to him and me." Iocasta continues: "As for Laius, foreign brigands killed him at a branching road; and as for the child, he was not three days old when Laius clamped his feet together and had him cast over a precipice." This is the only reference in the play to the birth: so far from suggesting any defiance on the part of Laius, much less an act of lust (as Richard Lattimore has recently propounded), the text is at least compatible with the assumption that the fatal child may have been conceived already. Some scholars, anxious to find explanatory guilt, have urged that Laius incurred *hybris* by trying to thwart the will of god. On this, two remarks only: (i) the suggestion is never made by Sophocles, and we do not get nearer to a dramatist's thought by adding to a play bits and pieces which he neither says nor implies (nor, for that matter, do we appreciate a painter better by looking at his work through green or red spectacles). (ii) What opposite fault would we now be imputing to Laius if he had done nothing, in the face of so dire a threat? No; we must stick to the text.

Sophocles' story continues with the two shepherds who, from such natural motives, saved the child, so that it was brought up, in Corinth, by Polybus and Merope. Then comes the man who got tipsy at a banquet and opened his mouth too wide — "A remarkable incident," says Oedipus (777 ff.), "though hardly worth the attention I gave it." Polybus and Merope deny the story, indignantly; but the rumor spreads, and so rankles with Oedipus that he goes to Delphi, without telling his "parents". Now comes the second bolt from the blue: instead of answering his question, Phoebus tells him that he is to marry his mother, produce children of shame, and kill his father; to avoid which he takes the other road, resolved never to see Corinth

again. There follows the affray at the Three Ways, and it is so told as to absolve Oedipus from serious guilt; a modern verdict would be Justifiable Homicide. The truculent charioteer and the old man tried to hustle Oedipus off the road; Oedipus angrily struck the charioteer, but when he was level with the chariot the old man aimed a murderous blow at his head, and if he had not been quick on the draw he would have been killed — and the prophecy would have been turned upside down. That Oedipus went on to kill (as he thought) all the others too seems unnecessary — except, obviously, for the sake of the plot; but if this is guilt, it has nothing to do with the fulfillment of the prophecies. Next, the affair of the Sphinx: Oedipus accepts the offer of the vacant throne, and of the vacant Queen also, though Sophocles has no word to say about this. One or two critics, who like their Sophocles made easy, have written that Oedipus was lured on by the prospect of glory, wealth and power: Sophocles himself is not of this company. To say this is to rewrite, not explain, the play.

Here ends the past story, embedded in the present action; this is precisely how Sophocles presents it — and what other dramatists did is not evidence. It justifies two general assertions. One is that Sophocles has avoided moralizing it. He has not made the begetting of Oedipus a crime or even culpable folly; he has not made the slaying of Laius a wanton act; he imputes no blame to Oedipus for accepting the throne and queen of Thebes. The second point is that he has made no attempt at all to make us feel the presence of some controlling Power in the background. Twice the god speaks; then, having spoken, he retires and allows things to take their course. What happens is presented as being entirely within the competence of the human agents, as a group. Laius might have destroyed the child: in fact, he thought he had. For reasons which may be obvious, but are not suggested by Sophocles, he did something that was just as good — except that it wasn't. The first shepherd happened not to be a brute; he acted, as he says, out of pity. The second was willing to bring himself to the favorable notice of his king. A man gets drunk — unhappily, a common occurrence — and blurts out a rumor which happens to be true. Polybus and Merope might have said: "Well, Oedipus, you are old enough now to be told the truth . . ." They did not — and had no second chance, for Oedipus, in his impetuous way, went to Delphi without telling them. It may sound an odd thing to say, but the whole story, oracles apart, is so true to life. Not of course in any naturalistic sense; I do not mean that the

play might have been entitled: *Oedipus Tyrannus, or, A Typical Day in Thebes*. I mean that every single detail, barring the oracles, rings true: we know that we (like Laius) can bet on an apparent certainty and lose; that good intentions, like the shepherd's pity, can produce disastrous consequences; that people will shrink from admitting the truth, as Polybus and Merope did, and that this may prove ruinous; that coincidences do occur, like the meeting of Oedipus and Laius, and that men can be truculent, or irascible. "But," they say, "it is fantastic that all these things should happen together, to one man." And are we to suppose that Sophocles had not noticed this? He insists that no man has ever suffered as Oedipus has done — and he knew the difference between drama and reporting. The story is so fantastically untrue to life, in the literal sense, that our conclusion ought to be not that Sophocles was something of a ninny, but that we ourselves are probably on the wrong track. If we are intelligent enough to see that the play gives no balanced picture of life, we should exercise our intelligence a little further: we should reflect on the notable differences in style, texture, length between a Greek play and a novel by Dickens or Dostoevsky, which point to the conclusion that the form which these novelists used is capable of giving a balanced picture of life, while the Greek form is so incapable of giving one that presumably those who used it had no such generous ambition; that it is however remarkably well adapted to the making of one general statement about life.

Each single incident in the play, I repeat, is the sort of thing that can and does happen. Oedipus is the only man intelligent enough to answer the Sphinx's riddle, yet he goes and marries a woman old enough to be his mother. He didn't think; anyhow, he *knew* that his mother was Merope — though there had been a rumor even about that; just as Iocasta *knew* that the child had been destroyed, and that the prophecy had been belied. Sophocles does not blame these people; neither therefore must we; it is not a matter of guilt and punishment, but of how people can in fact be deceived.

So far my suggestion is this: if we can be sceptical enough to hold in suspense our own conviction, which in any case the other plays contradict, that these people are puppets dancing at the end of a divine piece of string, then the facts of the play create the impression that the god, twice, has given them a dire warning, and has left them to handle the situation. They act as their intelligence and resolution suggest, and they fail. Here we leave the matter until we have contemplated the structure which Sophocles built out of this material.

For clarity and convenience I divide the play into four main areas: (i) the opening scenes and the first ode; (ii) the two long scenes with Teiresias and Creon; (iii) from Iocasta's entry to the discovery and the self-blinding; (iv) all that follows the reappearance of Oedipus. We shall see that (ii) and (iv) both end in a way which the raw material does not in the least suggest or require, and that (iii) contains much that does not come from the myth, and is in itself rather surprising.

(i) needs no elaborate comment. Obviously, it presents Oedipus in the sharpest possible contrast to what he will be at the end of the play; the illusion is contrasted with the reality. He is the great and devoted king (and this, at least, is not illusion); he is almost god-like in his eminence, wisdom, intelligence; he is utterly remote from the public calamity, except that he is king of the afflicted city. Next, the plague is described, once by the Priest, once by the Chorus. One odd thing about the Plague is that as the play goes on Sophocles allows us to forget it. Therefore it is not a major part of Sophocles' structure. It forces the discovery, of course — but is that all? If we listen with any care to the descriptions of it, we notice that the nature of the plague — sterility in crops, cattle, the human kind — is nicely proportioned to the nature of the offenses — Oedipus' crimes against his parents. As at the beginning of *Hamlet*, things done contrary to Nature cause a perturbation in nature: "Foul deeds will rise . . ." — But why say "crimes", "foul deeds"? Was not Oedipus ignorant, therefore innocent — unlike Claudius? Certainly he was, but the Greek gods take no account of ignorance and innocence, being in this respect like some of the gods whom we know today: if I innocently drink some strychnine thinking it is lemonade, the god who is in charge of these things will not let me live because I did not intend suicide.

(ii) Of this part of the structure we say, truly enough, that it begins the long and stealthy process of discovery, and does it with consummate skill. Yes, but a simple question suggests itself, and deserves an answer: why should Sophocles have contrived the passage in such a way that it ends in a notable climax which does nothing to help the plot? For it ends in a violent scene in which Oedipus, virtually, commits an unpardonable and stupid crime. It is such a jangling climax that it takes a long passage of music and lyric poetry to calm things down to a point at which the detective work can be resumed; and we should notice that Oedipus at last gives way not in the least because he is convinced of error, but simply as a reluctant favor to

Iocasta and the Chorus. It is a really frightening display of tyrannical hybris: why is it there? We can say: "Sophocles is showing us how irascible and violent Oedipus could be." Of course he is, but since the character of Oedipus was not a fact in natural history but the invention of Sophocles, we still want to know why he should have wanted to invent an Oedipus who could so suddenly go to the verge of a judicial murder. It is not true that it was through such a strong admixture of hybris in his character that he fulfilled the prophecy, unless we were entirely mistaken in saying that the past story is not moralized: in resenting the insolence of the charioteer and hitting him he did indeed show hot temper, but that is very different from the monstrous thing that he proposes to do here. In short, this condemnation of Creon does not explain the past, and it does not affect the future; there is of course something in common between what he does now and what he had done earlier (namely an excessive reliance on his own judgment), but it is not hybris. There is however one further point that should not pass unobserved, namely the general resemblance between the end of the present scene and the more elaborate passage in the *Antigone* (727-739) in which Haemon accuses his father of behaving like a tyrant: in each case the implication is that the King is behaving in a way that would destroy the rights of the citizen. Here, for the moment, we will leave this matter; it is something of a puzzle — especially if our minds are full of Predestination or Free Will.

(iii) When we are more or less on even keel again we have the scene in which Iocasta reassures Oedipus. She knows for certain that one oracle has failed, but in proving it she makes that mention of the Three Ways which fills Oedipus with terror.

At this point Sophocles writes an impressive ode, one which has caused much discussion. "May reverent purity in word and deed always be with me, for the Eternal Laws enjoin it. Hybris breeds the tyrant, and is always overthrown; though may the protecting god never stop that emulation which is for the city's good. He who is arrogant, irreverent, irreligious, unafraid of Dike (Justice, or Retribution), may he perish! If conduct like this is praised, why should I join in the sacred dance? If these oracles are not manifestly fulfilled, religion is at an end. Mighty Zeus! they are setting at naught the failing oracles of Laius; religion is dying."

Three questions. — Whose hybris is in question? Why, since the chorus heretofore, and again in the next ode, is entirely loyal to Oedipus, does Sophocles make it pray now for the literal fulfillment of the

oracles? Finally, what sort of a mind did Sophocles have, that he should equate the verity of oracles with the validity of religion?

The hybris is commonly supposed to be that displayed in the scepticism of Iocasta. This will not do. Certainly the ode ends with a reference to it, but no audience would think of Iocasta during the first three stanzas. She did in fact carefully distinguish between the infallible god and his fallible interpreters, and if this is hybris, then the chorus itself is equally guilty, for they said exactly the same in the third stanza of their previous ode. The reference to "contention which is for the city's good" clearly points to the outstanding hybris that we have seen with our own eyes, the contention that was for nobody's good: Oedipus' treatment of Creon.

As for the second question: it is true that Sophocles normally gives a definite character to a chorus, but it is not true that he binds himself to make the chorus always speak, or rather sing, in that character. Sometimes he will use it as a purely lyrical instrument, as he notably does in the Danaeode of the *Antigone*.³ In the present ode he "distances" the chorus, in Aeschylean fashion; he makes it stand back somewhat, to contemplate not the immediate situation but rather one of its general implications. To this point we shall return.

In considering the third question we must distinguish. Many fifth-century Athenians undoubtedly believed implicitly in the truth of oracles, many did not. Whether Sophocles did is a biographical question, and I do not know how to determine it. What we can do — the only important thing — is to determine the significance of oracles in his dramatic thinking, and that seems quite clear: it is the dramatic expression of his faith that the universe is ultimately not chaotic but orderly: it has its general laws. What follows, I think, will prove this.

What follows is a scene which, like the condemnation of Creon, we could not possibly have predicted from our survey of the raw material. It is not "myth"; it is pure Sophocles. What makes it the more interesting, and revealing, is that the sequence that we find here is exactly the same as that in the (presumably later) *Electra* — with one challenging difference. In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra, terrified by a dream, comes out and offers prayer and sacrifice to Apollo that he will save and protect her. At once there enters a messenger with good news: Orestes is dead. She is triumphant — but not for long: the message was a false one, designed to throw her off her guard; and we recall that when Orestes had asked Apollo how he should attempt his vengeance the god had said "By guile." In the *Tyrannus*, the

Queen, badly frightened, comes out and offers prayer and sacrifice to Apollo that he will deliver them. At once the man from Corinth enters with good news: Oedipus' father has just died. Iocasta is triumphant — but by the end of the scene she has gone in to hang herself. So does Apollo answer these two prayers.

The parallel is exact, except that it seems to break down at a critical point; and here, religious ideas native to us will do nothing to help us, only create confusion. For Clytemnestra's prayer is in the highest degree blasphemous. Her prayer is that the god shall maintain her in her enjoyment of the fruits of murder, adultery, usurpation and theft, and shall not suffer Orestes to live and punish her. Iocasta is praying for no more than a harmless deliverance from the horrors that menace her and Oedipus, but let us look a little further. Clytemnestra's prayer was wicked, and she deserved what she got; Iocasta is innocent: granted. (For that matter, Oedipus too was innocent.) But Iocasta is really praying that the god shall avert what the god foresaw was going to happen; she is praying that the course of things may prove to have been unpredictable, even to a god; that the universe shall be proved random, in the power of arbitrary gods.

Is this far-fetched, and aridly philosophic? See what happens. Oedipus, in his enormous relief, says "Well, so much then for oracles" — though he is still afraid of marrying his mother. But this fear too Iocasta dismisses:

Why should we fear, seeing that man is ruled
By Chance, and there is room for no clear forethought?
No; live at random, live as best one can.
So, do not fear this marriage with your mother . . .

Now, the whole past story shows what a part is played in human affairs by what we, not being omniscient, have to call Chance. But Iocasta goes further: she attributes everything to Chance, and therefore, logically, denies the possibility of *pronoia*, "thinking beforehand." "Live from hand to mouth; do what seems best at the moment": that is the principle that she proclaims here; law, moral law, scruple — there is no room for such; and lest I be accused of chasing abstractions and neglecting the drama, I call attention to the terrible dramatic rhetoric that Sophocles uses here: the belief that all is random, and oracles untrustworthy, leads Iocasta, the mother of Oedipus, to comfort him by saying "So, do not fear this marriage with your mother." Where will one find a more explosive fusion of philosophic thought with dramatic imagination?

Now perhaps we begin to understand why the verity of oracles and the validity of religion were equated. If not even a god can foresee, Iocasta is right: life is random, and it is useless to try to live according to any principles.

The idea of Chance is taken up again at the end of the scene. When Iocasta has gone to her death, Oedipus, once again misreading a situation that confronts him, declares that she is proud, and is afraid she may find that her husband is baseborn; but

I count myself
The child of Fortune, giver of all good,
And I shall not be put to shame, for I
Am born of her.

The chorus, taking up the theme with music and the dance, says that their King will prove to be the son of some ageless nymph and a god; whereupon the slave of Laius enters, and a short scene during which we hardly dare breathe proves Oedipus to be the son not of a god and a nymph but of Laius and Iocasta, and Oedipus *is* put to some shame.

Why should we fear, seeing that man is ruled
By Chance?

This is the innocent delusion which, in its results — "Live from hand to mouth" — is more ruinous even than the open wickedness of Clytemnestra. There is Chance indeed, but there is also Law, including moral law. If men are rejecting religion, the Unwritten Laws, on the grounds that all is random, they are doing it at their peril.

It may be objected that in the past story, as presented by Sophocles, neither Oedipus nor his parents have conspicuously offended against the Unwritten Laws. This is perfectly true — but one long tract of the play still remains.

(iv) Oedipus, now blind, gropes his way out of the palace. To what consummation is Sophocles going to direct his play? What could be more obvious? The god's clear injunction, Oedipus' own decree, and the prophecy of Teiresias that Oedipus will become blind, a beggar, and an exile, all point to the inevitable and dramatic ending, the perfect counterpart of the beginning: Oedipus will now depart from Thebes for ever. But the inevitable ending is not in the least inevitable, for Sophocles.

For a long time it was my experience, and therefore may be that of others, that towards the end the play lacks impetus and tautness. In explanation, one can of course use the old incantation, that the

Greek tragic poets preferred to end quietly. As it happens, I have just been reading the *Electra*, and since no play known to me ends with a more shattering bang than this one, the incantation has ceased to cast any spell over me. Similarly (for this too would only be a way of avoiding observation and thought) it might be said that Sophocles avoided exiling Oedipus in this play for the sake of the *Coloneus* (written probably twenty years later), in which Oedipus, now an old man, has only recently been driven out of Thebes. — A plausible guess, if the ending of the *Tyrannus* is in fact tentative, a kind of half-close. But is it? We must look at the dramatic facts of the case, and if it appears that the scenes that are before us do, logically and convincingly, end the *Tyrannus*, then we need not invoke the *Coloneus*.

We note, in the first place, that Sophocles is not in the least self-conscious about the matter of the exile. The Messenger (1290 f.) reports that Oedipus, to fulfill his own curse, is going to cast himself out of Thebes; twice (1340, 1410) Oedipus beseeches the chorus to drive him out; three times (1436 f., 1449 ff., 1518) he begs it of Creon — and Creon refuses. This is one dramatic fact. Another is the surprising way in which the relationship of Oedipus and Creon is handled. We remember well enough what the situation was when last we saw the two men together; now, not only has Creon been vindicated with an awful completeness, but Oedipus has been proved to have done things even worse than that which he falsely imputed to Creon. It is a *peripeteia* such as a dramatist might dream of — yet Sophocles appears to do hardly anything with it. Further, although Sophocles was so subtle in the drawing of character, our impression of Creon is at the moment rather vague: here is the opportunity, therefore, to make it sharper — to show Creon as vindictively triumphant, or nobly forgiving, or at least *something* interesting. But this master of the dramatic art, having contrived so splendid a reversal of situation, so rich in possibilities, appears to be hardly interested in it. His Creon begins:

No exultation, Oedipus, and no reproach
For injuries inflicted brings me here —

"but," he continues, "do not affront Thebes and pollute the sunlight by standing here, in public." Oedipus answers: "Since against my expectation you are so generous, grant me one request . . ." We realize at once that Creon can forgive and forget, but the point is made with all despatch, almost as if it were only a necessary nuisance.

What else? We have already mentioned Teiresias' prophecy about the blindness, and Oedipus' passionate explanation of why he had to do it. There remains the scene with the two children.

Of this, we can certainly say that it is a natural development of the plot: natural, though not unavoidable, for no one would feel baffled or disappointed if the two girls were not produced. We can say — and why not? — that it shows us yet another facet of Oedipus' character: it is indeed an affecting moment when we have that glimpse (1462 f.) of a past domestic happiness now turned to horror. But the burden of the long speech that Oedipus makes to the children is that through no fault of theirs their future is irretrievably blasted.

Here we may recall the two shepherds who, after the discovery, had to stumble out of the theatre as best they could before the chorus could begin its last ode. The one, the Corinthian, had found his cheerful hopes turn to dust and ashes; the other had for years lived with a dreadful secret (758-764), and now has found that what he had known was only part of the horror. Now, in the two girls, the area of disaster is further enlarged. As we underestimate *Hamlet* unless we see that Laertes, Ophelia, even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are Hamlet's colleagues in tragedy, so we underestimate the scope of the *Tyrannus* unless to Oedipus himself we add, as tragic victims, not only Laius and Iocasta, but also the shepherds and the children. *This* is what Life can do to us, at its worst.

Then, having brought the children before us, why should Sophocles get them off the stage in the way he does? If at the end they went out in the train of Creon or of Oedipus, with nothing said, nobody would be surprised or even interested. Why does Sophocles make such a point of causing Creon to detach them from Oedipus? Certainly not in order to represent Creon as harsh; if he meant this, he has not made it clear; what is clear is that he has not this kind of interest in Creon's character at all. We will leave this point until we have dealt with the more important ones: the persistent denial of Oedipus' persistent demand to be driven out, and Sophocles' apparent indifference to the *peripeteia*.

If we, not being fifth-century Greeks, need a hint, we can find one in a certain verbal correspondence between this fourth part of the play and the second — which also, the reader may remember, gave us something of a puzzle. Following it up, we shall find that Sophocles does make use of his *peripeteia*, though not one which Aristotle and modern ideas about drama might have led us to expect. When Oedipus was beginning his examination of Creon, he said:

"When your late King was killed, why did not that clever prophet speak out *then*?" Creon's answer was: "I don't know, and when I have no knowledge I prefer to say nothing" (569). At the very end of the play, when Oedipus for the third time has asked Creon to drive him out, the dialogue continues like this: "What you ask is in the gift of the god." — "But the gods hate no one more than me!" — "Then you will soon gain your desire." — "You promise it?" — "Ah, no; for when I have no knowledge I prefer not to speak at random." It looks as if a contrast may be intended between Creon, who recognizes the limitations imposed by ignorance, and someone else.

But why does Creon refuse? As Oedipus keeps on saying, the matter is as clear as daylight: there was the god's command, and there is his own curse. "Yes," says Creon; "I would have done it; but first I wanted to ask the god what I should do . . . Yes, I know; but in our present pass it is better to ask how we should act" (1435-1443). This is another and much more important echo. In the second part of the play (603-8) Creon, accused on his life, had taken a solemn oath, had argued that the charge was on the face of it unreasonable, and finally had challenged Oedipus, unanswerably, to settle the matter by going himself to Delphi with the simple question whether Creon had correctly reported what the god had said. Oedipus brushes aside the oath, the argument, and, specifically, the challenge on the grounds that when an enemy is quick to plot one must be quick in one's reply. What the two parts of the play give us, therefore, is, if not an Aristotelian *peripeteia*, at least a striking and surely significant contrast: first, in a matter which not Creon only (608) but also the chorus (657) declares to be at least obscure, Oedipus will act, and act disastrously, on his own judgment, sweeping aside not only argument but also a challenge that would immediately decide the question; then, antistrophically, in a matter which seems abundantly clear, Creon will not act until he has found the better guidance which is available to him.

Now we can think again about "the beginnings of the discovery." These will certainly lead eventually to the truth, but first they lead Oedipus to the verge of murder. What is the idea? Reviewing the stealthy concatenation of details, as they are marshalled by Sophocles, we can see how natural it was, for the intelligent Oedipus, to piece together his clever inferences and to draw a conclusion which we can see is plausible and yet know to be entirely wrong; and on the strength of these, in unrestrained self-confidence, he proceeds to condemn Creon to death or exile. This intermediate climax, it may be,

is now less of a puzzle than it was before. Now we may recall how the Priest, in his first speech, had spoken of Oedipus' intelligence (31-9): virtually, "In apprehension, how like a god." — But not *quite* a god.

We return to the children. — This, as it happens, is the play which we have all been taught, not unreasonably, to regard as the masterpiece of dramatic construction; therefore it may be that its coping-stone was not chosen at random. What is it? Creon takes the children from Oedipus' embrace, and the play ends. Not perhaps our idea of a dramatic ending, but it was Sophocles' idea, here. The last words of the play as we have it (for the final tag of the chorus is not genuine) are: "Seek not to have control (*kratein*) in everything; the control you had has not endured." (The Greek word is associated with the ideas of power, might, force, domination.) This is the terminus at which Sophocles chose to arrive. We are not in control.

We are left looking at an immense catastrophe. Near its periphery are the minor victims, "small annexments"; near the center, Laius and Iocasta; at the center, Oedipus — all innocent. Oedipus, at the beginning, is immeasurably great; at the end, nothing, as the chorus bitterly says in its final ode. How did it happen? With divine foreknowledge indeed, though Sophocles, to say the least, is at no pains to make us feel that it is by divine contrivance. It happened, essentially, because everybody concerned did, quite naturally, what he did and not something else; and because unforeseeable circumstances occurred, like Laius' going to Delphi on that particular day. It is a picture not of what human life is, but of what it can be; an extreme picture, of course; Sophocles was no sentimental pessimist (for pessimism can be as flabby as optimism) but a realist: life can be like this.

But if this kind of thing can happen, at the worst, *why* should it happen? If in such a world there are gods, of what kind are they, and why should we worship them? These are questions natural to us, and this is where Christian ideas, even their relics, baffle us. We can hardly think of a God without also thinking of some Divine Purpose; the Greek could, and did. His *theoi* certainly ruled the universe, or ruled *in* it, but they had not created it, and the question of a Purpose hardly arose; the universe was a fact, and so were its gods. To ask *why* the gods allow such things to happen is to ask a meaningless question. Why is our universe so contrived that if two people of incompatible blood-groups have children, the children will die? What is the idea? There is no idea; it is simply the way in which things work; we cannot control it, but must learn to live with it. It is

bigger than we are, and we are wise to recognize the fact, and to behave accordingly.

This explains the third ode, which involves more than personal piety: it includes also "purity in word and deed", it includes modesty, restraint, a degree of humility before the gods; it condemns hybris, that wanton self-assertion and self-confidence which, as long experience proves, ends in overthrow. We are not in control; the thing is bigger than we are. We may vaunt ourselves on the power of our intelligence, and of course there is nothing amiss with intelligence; but it has its limits, for the whole thing is so complex, and it has its dangers: it may assure us that we are safe when we are not, and by increasing our self-confidence it may tempt us to folly or crime.

Sophocles, as Bernard Knox has well explained in the last chapter of his *Oedipus at Thebes*, had good reason for being serious about this: it was a time of "advanced thinking", of overconfident humanism. "The gods may or may not exist: the question is difficult, and life is short." "Man is the measure of all things." So taught the estimable Protagoras. Others, not so estimable, went much further. "Justice? Nothing but a conspiracy among the weak to defraud the strong of their natural rights. The cardinal virtues? Moonshine! Power and intelligent calculation are the guide to life. Gods? We are the masters now." Sophocles did not believe it.

Oddly enough, the best commentary on the *Tyrannus* is not Freud but a younger contemporary of the poet's, also an Athenian: Thucydides the historian, particularly, though by no means exclusively, in his Melian Dialogue and the tragic story that follows. In the Dialogue the Athenians, demanding the immediate surrender of an inoffensive neutral island, expressly set aside (according to Thucydides) all talk of justice and nonsense of that kind: Athens is powerful, and Melos is weak. The Melians, they say, must be intelligent, face facts, set aside the delusions of hope and the idea that the gods may help them: the gods are on the side of the big battalions. Having massacred the Melians because they would not yield, the Athenians attack Sicily with a fleet of unparalleled magnificence and power, with unbounded hopes, and — says Thucydides — with a good deal of ignorance. But in the event, what with sheer mischance, a certain lack of resolution, the fact that the political situation in Sicily was not quite what they had counted on, and that by a very simple trick they had been deceived about the immense wealth which would be at their disposal in the island, hardly a man came back alive, either from this proud fleet or from a second, not inferior, which had re-

inforced it. In the third ode of the play the chorus execrates the man who is "unafraid of Dike": Thucydides makes the Melians ask the Athenians if they are not afraid of Retribution; "No," they reply; "we are not." Perhaps the new wisdom was not so very wise after all.

Sophocles, like Thucydides, was well aware of the power of chance, and took it into his reckoning, but he did not make the mistake that he attributes to Iocasta: chance is an inescapable part of our universe, but not the whole of it. There is much that we cannot know or foresee, but the man who does not revere the gods and scrupulously obey those of the divine laws that we do know is in the first place a fool, and in the second place will be led into the wickednesses which in their turn lead to disaster. "Then, if we behave ourselves, shall we be safe?" This is crying for the moon; this is not the way in which the gods work. But what you can be sure of is that if you give way to overconfidence, with immodesty towards that great and incalculable thing that surrounds us, you will incur disaster.

In the play the past action is not moralized. Exceptionally, so far as Sophocles' extant plays go, the god directly intervenes, twice: he tells Laius, and then Oedipus, precisely what they have to fear. They do not need to guess: they know. They are left to handle the situation. They do what they think is prudent, and they fail. We are invited not to blame them but to pity them — and, if we think fit, to take a warning. In the present action of the play we see how the great illusion collapses into misery; we see how blind was the keen-sighted Oedipus; we see further how his quick and assured intelligence, working in the darkness which he mistook for light, went hopelessly astray and, at least for the moment, converted the great and generous King into a hateful Tyrant. "Seek not to have control in all things": not perhaps the ending that we should have expected, but it is the ending which is the grave and inevitable climax to all that has gone before. The exiling of Oedipus, particularly at his own insistence, would have been a false ending. Sophocles, naturally, was aware of the fact.

I sometimes idly toy with the fancy that perhaps Thucydides was present at the first performance of the *Tyrannus*, and that they dined together after the play; if so (I wonder), what did they talk about? Thucydidean scholars assure us that the historian did not believe in the gods. No, the gods play no part in his work; he never mentions them. Moreover, he is ironical about oracles. Still, I think that he and Sophocles would have understood each other quite well.

NOTES

1. *Contemporary Review*, CLXXVII, 176-181.
2. I have argued this in detail elsewhere: see for example *Sophocles: Dramatist and Philosopher*, pp. 42-57.
3. See my *Form and Meaning in Drama*, pp. 171-3.

The *Ars Poetica* of Horace

A new translation, with introduction,

by NORMAN J. DEWITT

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This English version of the Ars Poetica was prepared in the fall of 1959 and mimeographed for a practical purpose: to make a leading document in literary criticism available to local students in a form that could be kept indefinitely without evoking ominous messages from the library. Palmer Bovie's verse translation of the Satires and Epistles of Horace has since become available in a Phoenix paperback; I have elected, however, to stand by a prose version: in part, I fear, because writing verse is one of the extra-curricular enterprises of my college days, about which I now maintain a dignified reserve; and otherwise because the Horatian expository hexameter seems to come off somewhat better in English prose. One sacrifices something, to be sure; Horace did write in regular meter; but one gains, I feel, by avoiding the temptation which presents itself to the translator in verse: to be either cute or frisky. Horace, after all, was a classical poet.

As for the essay-letter itself: the reader who is not addicted to classical philology need be advised only that the substantive aesthetic and dramatic theory set forth by Horace was not quite original with him: he derived some of it from the general critical lore of the Hellenistic schools and found it intellectually congenial. But like Cicero, who also relied on the learning of the Greeks, Horace added something of his own, something Roman.

In point of originality, two aspects of the Ars Poetica should be noted.

First, the student who comes to the Ars Poetica in the course of readings in Horace (rather than directly from Aristotle's Poetics in a course in literary criticism, ordered chronologically) will observe that the beginning and the end of the work (and some of the middle) have the technique of satire: there are the exaggerated examples of artistic incongruity at the beginning, and at the end Horace loses his temper and lays about him with quite as much zest as Juvenal ever does in his passages of highest indignation.

Second, it is a fairly sound principle in examining satirical writing that there is an implicit norm or standard of propriety which can be inferred and stated explicitly by the student. (Very often the norm of satire is simply "common sense, common honesty, common decency," as H. L. Mencken once put it.) In the case of the Ars Poetica, the norms are stated explicitly. There are the substantive academic materials, which Horace dutifully sets forth; there are also the literary standards and procedures which reflect the serious thought and discourse of the intensely earnest literary group often called the "Augustan circle." These standards and procedures Horace commends to his young literary advisees.

Vergil and Horace became, of course, the immortals of the circle. With

the encouragement of Augustus and the patronage of Maecenas, they supported the official policy of making Rome a cultural center that would equal Athens and Alexandria in accomplishment and prestige. Latin had to have its epic, its history, its lyric poetry and, of course, its drama. (There is an unfortunate tendency to view the literary outcome of these aspirations as "propaganda," as though something sinister were afoot: in the sense, one might infer, that there is presently a plot under way to establish a national repertory theater in Minneapolis.)

But while the *Ars Poetica* is ostensibly directed to the standards and procedures to be observed in the writing of poetry, with such recognition of dramatic theory as may be appropriate, the satirical vehemence of the work is directed against all less than first-rate poetry. Anything but the best is insufferable. Literature is a severe discipline; it requires strict intellectual honesty, rigorous self-criticism, submission to competent criticism from others, indefatigable industry, infinite pains, driving ambition, absolute dedication: all imposed on natural talent. These are the conditions of classicism.

The formal theories set forth by Horace, we have seen, are not original. Most readers, one suspects, find them somewhat unexciting after reading Aristotle's *Poetics*. There is no terse, compelling, logical analysis; and worst of all, no fear, no pity, no high sense of cosmic fate and human error.

But Aristotle and Horace present two entirely different ways of thought. Both are commonly used.

The two ways may be illustrated by an analogy from botany. Imagine that we have a raspberry, a bean pod, a Winesap apple, a cocklebur, and an acorn. These are all fruits, as far as the botanist is concerned. Let us also imagine that we have come by these five fruits by accident or by random selection, rather than by any deliberate choice of ours. The two ways of thought then present themselves.

We may decide that the Winesap apple is the fruit, by definition ideally representative of the general class of fruit.

We may decide that a fruit, by definition, must embrace the common properties of all specimens of fruit.

Our modern concept of tragedy, reinforced by Aristotle, is based on the first procedure. But it may be observed that the primacy of the Winesap apple as a fruit depends upon criteria exterior to the natural order of presentation. It may also be observed that our concept of tragedy relies on a very few surviving plays plus extensive but unrecognized commitments to some of Aristotle's major concepts, e.g. the inevitable historical development of an organism, an organization, or an institution (e.g. drama) toward a pre-existent ideal form in a managed universe (i.e. the organization of the universe itself as an administrative enterprise).

The Greeks (and Romans), by and large, appear to have followed the second procedure: taking tragedy simply as it came, they thought of tragedies, by general definition, simply as plays about the legendary aristocracy of Greece. Plato, whose youth fell within the fifth century, viewed tragedy with very grave misgivings; its emotional appeal for the Athenian audience, one may venture to infer from Plato's comments, was comparable to that of Stella Dallas combined with *The Thing* from the Asteroid Belt. And while Aristotle's influence in general has been profound ever since his day, his specific

~~tend to~~ influence in the Hellenistic world (the third century B.C. and thereafter) ~~tend to~~ disperse into one or another special field of inquiry; his views of the managed universe, as well as our view of tragedy, cannot fairly be said to represent "Greek thought" or "the Greek point of view" other than by our own contemporary fiat, i.e., the Winesap apple method.

Horace, on the other hand, follows the general or non-idealizing concept of tragedy. He is telling the two young Pisones how to write good plays about tragic characters, i.e., late Bronze Age personages. And it may be added that the critical tradition which he follows does not use the structural, whole-and-parts, technique so common in Aristotle's writings (e.g. tragedy, as a whole, has six parts). The veteran professor, when dealing with almost any work of Aristotle, will feel an urge to reach for the chalk and diagram the current structure on the board; to illustrate the Horatian concept of unity, the professor would have to make drawings on the board with, one assumes, pastel crayons.

(The numbers inserted in the translation give the approximate location of every tenth line in the Latin text; the original translation was made from Bennett and Rolfe's annotated text; the revision presented here has been checked against F. Klingner's Teubner text of 1950.)

Suppose a painter meant to attach a horse's neck to the head of a man, and to put fancy-work of many-colored feathers on limbs of creatures picked at random; the kind of thing where the torso of a shapely maiden merges into the dark rear half of a fish; would you smother your amusement, my friends, if you were let in to see the result?

Believe me, Pisones, a book will be very much like that painting if the meaningless images are put together like the dreams of a man in a fever, to the end that the head and the foot do not match the one body.

"Poets and painters have always enjoyed this fair privilege, of experimenting however they will." (10)

I know it; and I claim that privilege as a poet and, as a poet, I grant it to the painter; but not to the extent that vicious creatures mate with gentle ones, that snakes are paired with birds, lambs with tigers.

When a poem has a pretentious introduction, promising great themes, a bright red patch or two is usually stitched on, to achieve an expansive, colorful effect, as when a sacred grove and an altar of Diana are described, or a hurrying rivulet of water wandering through the lovely meadows, or the river Rhine, or a rainbow. All very well; but there was no place for these scenes at this point in the poem.

And perhaps you know how to represent a cypress tree: what good is this when the client who has paid your fee in advance is swimming for his life in the picture from the wreckage of his ship? (20) I have started to mould a two-handled jar to hold wine: why does a pitcher come off the potter's turning wheel? What I am getting at is this: let the work of art be whatever you want, as long as it is simple and has unity.

To you, Piso senior, and to you sons worthy of your father, I admit that the majority of us poets are tricked by our own standards. I work hard to be brief; I turn out to be obscure. When I try to achieve smoothness and polish, I lose punch, the work lacks life; the poet who proposes grandeur is merely pompous; the poet who tries to be too conservative creeps on the ground, afraid of gusts of wind; if he is anxious to lend marvellous variety to a single subject, he paints a dolphin in the forest, a boar in the breakers. (30) The avoidance of mistakes leads to serious defects if one is lacking in artistic sense. The sculptor in the last studio around the [gladiatorial] school of Aemilius will mould fingernails and imitate wavy hair in bronze, but the net effect of the work will be unfortunate because he will not know how to represent the whole. If I wanted to make a comparison, I would not care to be like him any more than to go through life with an ugly nose but good-looking otherwise, with dark eyes and dark hair.

If you plan to write, adopt material to match your talents, and think over carefully what burdens your shoulders will not carry and how strong they really are. When a writer's chosen material matches his powers, the flow of words will not fail nor will clarity and orderly arrangement. (40) This is the virtue and charm of such arrangement, unless I am mistaken: that one says now what ought to be said and puts off for later and leaves out a great deal for the present. The author of a poem that has been [asked for and] promised likes one thing and rejects another, is sensitive and careful in putting words together.

Again, you will have expressed yourself with distinction if a clever association gives an old word new meaning. If it turns out to be necessary to explain recent discoveries with new terms, you will be allowed to invent words never heard by the Cethegi in their loin-cloths; (50) and licence will be given if you exercise it with due restraint; and new words, recently invented, will win acceptance if they spring from a Greek source with a minor twist in meaning. For that matter, what will a Roman grant to Caecilius and Plautus that

he takes away from Vergil and Varius? As for me, why should I be criticized if I add a few words to my vocabulary, when the language of Cato and Ennius enriched the speech of our fathers and produced new names for things? It has always been permissible, and always will be, to mint words stamped with the mark of contemporary coinage. (60)

As the forests change their foliage in the headlong flight of years, as the first leaves fall, so does the old crop of words pass away, and the newly born, like men in the bloom of their youth, come then to the prime of their vigor. We and our works are mortgaged to die. It may be that the land embraces Neptune and diverts the north wind from our navy, the engineering of a king; or a swamp, long unproductive, and good only for boating, now feeds nearby towns and feels the heavy burden of the plow; or it may be that a river, a ravager of fruitful fields, has changed its course, has been taught to follow a better channel: no matter, human accomplishments will pass away, much less does the status of speech endure and popular favor persist. Many things are resurrected which once had passed away, and expressions which are now respected in turn will pass, (70) if usage so decrees — the usage over which the authority and norm of daily speech have final jurisdiction.

The careers of kings and leaders, and sorrow-bringing battles: the meter in which to compose these, Homer has shown us. Laments were first expressed in couplets of unequal lines; later, sentiments of vows fulfilled were included [in this verse] as well. However, what author first published dainty elegiacs, the philologists are arguing, and up to now the dispute rests unresolved. A nasty temper armed Archilochus with his specialty, iambic lines; the sock of comedy and the elevated boot of tragedy took on this meter, (80) just the thing for on-stage conversation, to rise above the noisy audience and quite natural for relations of events. The Muse gave men of wealth and sons of gods, and the victor in the boxing ring and the horse first in the contest, and the heartaches of youth and relaxing wine, to lyric poetry to sing about.

The standard distinctions and overtones of poetic forms: why should I be addressed as a poet if I cannot observe and know nothing about them? Why should I, with a feeble sense of shame, prefer to be ignorant rather than learn them? A comic situation does not want to be treated in tragic verse forms; in the same way, the banquet of Thyestes repudiates a telling in the lines of everyday affairs, close to the level of comedy. (90)

Let each form of poetry occupy the proper place allotted to it.

There are times, however, when comedy raises its voice and an angry Chremes scolds in fury with his swollen cheeks; and, in tragedy, Telephus and Peleus very often express their pain in prose, when the penniless hero and the exile both project inflated lines and complicated compound words, if they are anxious to touch the hearts of the audience with their complaints of deep distress.

It is not enough for poems to be pretty; they must have charm and they must take the heart of the hearer wheresoever they will. (100) Just as the faces of men smile back at those who smile at them, so they join with those who weep. If you want me to weep, you must first feel sorrows yourself; then your misfortunes, Telephus or Peleus, hurt me, too. If you speak your lines badly, I'll go to sleep — or laugh out loud. Sad words fit a mournful face, words full of threats an angry face, playful words a face in fun, words seriously expressed, a sober face. I mean that Nature has already shaped us inwardly for every phase of fortune: fortune makes us happy, or drives us into anger or brings us down to earth with a burden of grief and then torments us. (110) Afterwards it brings out our emotions and our tongue acts as interpreter. If the lines do not correspond to the emotional state of the speaker, the members of the Roman audience will burst out laughing, regardless of their income bracket.

It will make a great deal of difference whether a comedy slave or a tragic hero is speaking, or a man of ripe old age, or a hothead in the flower of youth, or a great lady, or a worrying nursemaid, or a traveling merchant or the farmer of a few flourishing acres, a character from Colchis or an Assyrian, a native of Thebes or of Argos.

You have two choices: either follow the conventions of the stage or invent materials that are self-consistent.

If, as a writer, you happen to bring back on the stage an Achilles (120) whose honor has been satisfied, energetic, hotheaded, ruthless, eager, let him claim that laws were not made for him, that there is nothing not subject to possession by force. Let Medea be wild and untamed, Ino an object of pity and tears, Ixion treacherous, Io a wanderer, Orestes depressed.

If you risk anything new and original on the stage and have the courage to invent a new character, let it maintain to the very end the qualities with which it first appeared — and let it be self-consistent.

It is difficult to develop everyday themes in an original way, and

you would do better to present the *Iliad* in dramatic form than if you were the first to produce unknown materials never used before on stage. Material in the public domain will become your private property if you do not waste your time going around in worn-out circles, and do not be a literal translator, faithfully rendering word for word from Greek, and do not be merely an imitator, thereby getting yourself into a hole from which either good conscience, or the laws of the work itself, will forbid you to climb out.

And do not start off like this, the way a cyclic poet once did: "I shall sing of the fate of Priam and a war of renown." What did this promise produce to match such a wide open mouth? The mountains will go into labor and deliver a silly mouse! How much more properly this poet began who undertook nothing in poor taste: (140) "Sing to me, Muse, of the man who, after the time of the capture of Troy, saw the ways of numbers of men and their cities." He gives thought to producing a light from the smoke, not smoke from the gleam of the firelight, so that he may bring forth beauty thereafter, and wonder, Antiphates and Scylla and with the Cyclops, Charybdis; nor does he in detail relate the return of Diomedes after the passing of Meleager, or the story of the Trojan War, starting with the twin eggs. He speeds always on to the outcome, and rushes his hearer into the midst of the action just as if the setting were known, and the events that he cannot hope to treat with brilliance, he omits. (150) And then, too, his inventions are such that fiction is mingled with fact to the end that the middle may match with the start and the end with the middle.

Listen to me: here is what I look for in a play, and with me, the public.

If you want a fan in the audience who waits for the final curtain and stays in his seat to the very end, when the singer says, "Give us a hand," you must observe the habits and manners of each period in men's lives, and the proper treatment must be given to their quickly changing characters and their years. The little boy who already knows how to talk plants his feet firmly on the ground, and is eager to play with boys of his own age, and loses his temper and for no good reason gets it back, and changes his disposition every hour. (160)

The adolescent boy with no beard as yet, when [to his relief] he at last is on his own, has fun with hounds and horses and the turf of the sunny Campus, soft as wax to be moulded to folly, resentful of advice, slow to anticipate what is good for him, throwing his money around, high-spirited and eager, quick to change his interests.

The age of maturity brings a change of interests, and the manly character seeks influence and friends, becomes a slave to ambition and is wary of commitments that he will soon have to break off with great difficulty.

Many disagreeable circumstances surround the old man; for example, he still seeks for wealth and, poor fellow, shrinks from spending it, (170) or, again, his management of everything is over-cautious and without any fire, he is indecisive, hopeful without reason, slow to act, grasping for time, hard to get along with, always complaining, always praising the way things were when he was a boy, scolding and correcting the young generation. The years as they come bring with them many advantages, and as they go, take many things away.

Do not by any chance let the character of the elderly be assigned to a younger man, or a man to a boy; we shall always insist upon the qualities of character joined and fitted to the proper age of man.

An event is either acted on the stage or is reported as happening elsewhere. (180) Events arouse our thoughts more slowly when transmitted through the ears than when presented to the accuracy of the eye and reported to the spectator by himself. On the other hand, do not bring out on stage actions that should properly take place inside, and remove from view the many events which the descriptive powers of an actor present on the stage will soon relate. Do not have Medea butcher her sons before the audience, or have the ghoulish Atreus cook up human organs out in public, or Procne turn into a bird, Cadmus into a snake. If you show me anything of this kind, I will not be fooled and I shall resent it.

Do not let a play consist of less than five acts or be dragged out to more than this length, if you want it to enjoy popular demand and have a repeat performance.

Do not have a god intervene unless the complication of the plot turns out to be appropriate to divine solution; and do not have a fourth leading character working hard to get in with his lines.

Have the chorus carry the part of an actor and take a manly role in the play, and do not let them sing anything between the acts which does not contribute to the plot and fit properly into it. The chorus should side with the good and give friendly advice, curb those who are angry and befriend those who fear to do wrong; the chorus should praise a dinner which has but few courses, healthy legal processes and law, and the conditions of peace when the gates of the city stand open; the chorus will keep secrets, entreat the gods and pray that good fortune will come back to the afflicted and desert the over-

confident. (200)

The pipes (not, as now, displaced by the brass and their rival the trumpet, but slender in tone and simple, with only a few stops) used to be helpful in accompanying and supporting the chorus and in filling the auditorium (which was not, in those days, overcrowded) with its music — the audience in which the entire community gathered was then such as one could count, what with its small size; it was thrifty, moral and proper.

After the community began to win wars and extend its domain, and the walls of the city enclosed a wider area, and one's guardian spirit was appeased on holidays without reproach with wine in the daytime, (210) greater license in meters and modes came to the theater. This is to say: what critical sense could an ignorant community have when freed from work, the farmer mingling with the townsman, the commoner with the gentleman? And so the flute player added movement and display to the old-fashioned art and trailed his costume about on the platform. And so, again, they invented special notes for the once sober lyre, and the unrestrained speech of the chorus gave rise to a new kind of eloquence, wise in advice on matters of state, and its divine utterances of things to come were quite in the oracular manner of Delphic ambiguities.

The writer who entered the contest for a common goat (220) in tragic verse soon added rustic satyrs with scanty clothing, and crudely tried his hand at humor without loss of tragic dignity, for the reason that the member of the audience had to be kept in his seat by the enticements of novelties, because after taking part in the Bacchic rituals, he was drunk and rowdy. But it is expedient, nonetheless, to sanction the merry, impudent satyrs, to turn solemnity into jest, so that whatever god, whatever hero, may have been but now presented on the stage in gold and royal purple, shall not move into the slums, use vulgar speech, or, while avoiding the ground, grasp at verbal clouds and empty words. (230)

Tragedy is above spouting frivolous lines, like a modest matron told to dance on festive days; she [tragedy] will have little to do, as a respectable woman, with the boisterous satyrs.

As a writer of satyr-plays, my Pisones, I for one will not favor the commonplace and current nouns and verbs, and I shall not try to differ in vocabulary, from the speech that gives tragedy its color; it will make a difference whether Davus is speaking and the saucy Pythias who has swindled a talent out of Simo, or Silenus, the guardian and attendant of a divine foster child.

I shall follow a poetic style from well-known material, just the same as anyone may expect to do himself; (240) and just the same, if he tries it, he will perspire freely and make little progress: that's how difficult the order and connections of words are: that's how much distinction is attached to our everyday vocabulary.

Fauns imported from the woodlands, in my opinion, should be careful not to carouse around in polished lines, like boys reared at the four corners and practically brought up in the Forum, nor shout out dirty words, make scandalous remarks. I mean, they will offend members of the audience who have a house, a distinguished father, and wealth, who will not accept calmly and give the prize to entertainment that pleases the purchaser of dried peas and nuts. (250)

A long syllable following a short is called "iambic," a rapid foot; for this reason, it had the name "three-measure iambic" [trimeter] applied to itself although the beat, the same from first to last, adds up to six per line. Not so very long ago, so that the line might come to the ear more slowly and with a little more weight, the iambic shared its traditional privileges with the steady spondee, accommodating and tolerant, with the reservation that the iambic foot would not, as a partner, move out of its first and fourth position. The spondee, I may add, rarely appears in Accius' "noble" trimeters; and it burdens Ennius' verses, sent ponderously out on the stage, (260) with the charge of overhasty work and the lack of care and attention, or shameful neglect of the principles of art.

No critic whom you may name in Rome can see that a poem is unmusical; and Roman poets have been given unwarranted freedom. Because of that, am I to wander around and write free verse? Or am I to assume that everyone will see my mistakes and play it safe and stay cautiously within the limits of the license I may be granted? No; what I have been saying simply amounts to this: I have merely managed to escape criticism; I have not earned praise.

You — turn our Greek models in your hands at night, turn them in the daytime. But, you say, your forefathers praised the lives and jokes of Plautus; (270) they were much too tolerant of both; they admired him, if I may say so, stupidly, assuming that you and I know how to tell the difference between expressions in poor and good taste, and have had enough experience to tell, on our fingers and by ear, when a sound has been produced according to the rules of meter.

Thespis is said to have discovered the form of tragic poetry and to have hauled his plays around on carts: plays sung and acted by those who had smeared their faces with sediment from wine jars.

After Thespis: the discoverer of the mask and colorful costume, Aeschylus, also constructed the stage on a limited scale, and taught how to speak in lofty style and to walk in the high boots of tragedy. (280)

After these came old comedy, not without considerable popular approval; but its freedom of speech fell off into license and a violence that deserved restraint by law: law was acknowledged and the chorus was disgraced into silence when its right to libel was removed.

Our Roman poets have not failed to try all forms of drama; they deserve no honor whatsoever for venturing to desert the trail blazed by the Greeks and attempting to give fame to Roman events — those who presented serious history or comedies of daily life. Nor would the land of the Latins be more mighty in valor and glory in war than in words, if the toil of time and polish did not discourage our poets, every one of them. (290) As for you, who represent the bloodline of Pompilius, see that you are severe in your censure of a poem that many a day and many an erasure has not trimmed down, and not corrected ten times by the test of a newly-cut fingernail.

Because Democritus believed natural talent to contribute more to success than pitiful technical competence, he barred from Helicon all poets who were mentally well-balanced; most poets do not bother to trim their nails, their beards, they look for out-of-the-way places, steer clear of the baths. I mean, one will acquire the title of poet and the reputation, if he never entrusts his head — too crazy to be cured by medicine even from three Anticyras — to Licinus the barber. (300)

Oh, how inept I am! I have myself purged of bile as the spring season comes on! Otherwise no man could write a better poem. But it isn't worth the trouble. I'll play the role of whetstone, which is good enough to put an edge on iron but is out of luck when it comes to cutting. While I write nothing myself, I'll teach the gift, the business of the poet, where he gets his material, what nourishes and forms the poet, what is appropriate, the way of right and wrong.

The origin and source of poetry is the wisdom to write according to moral principles: the Socratic dialogues will be able to clarify your philosophy, (310) and the words themselves will freely follow the philosophy, once it has been seen before you write. The man who has learned what he owes to his country, what he owes to his friends, what love is due a father, how a brother and a family friend are loved, what the duties of a senator are, what the duties of a judge, what roles a leader sent to war should play: he knows, as a matter of course, how to assign to each character what is appropriate for it.

I shall tell you to respect the examples of life and of good character — you who have learned the art of imitation — and from this source bring forth lines that live. Quite often a play which is impressive in spots and portrays good character, but with no particular charm, without real content and really good writing, (320) will give the public more pleasure and hold them better than lines without ideas and with resounding platitudes.

To the Greeks, genius, the gift of speaking in well-rounded phrases — these the Muse presented. The Greeks are greedy for nothing save acclaim. The Roman boys learn to calculate percentages of money by long division. "Let the son of Albinus tell me: if one-twelfth is taken from five-twelfths, what's the remainder? You should have been able to tell us by this time." "One-third." "*Très bien!* You'll make a good businessman. Add a twelfth, what happens?" "One-half." (330) When this smut, this worrying about business arithmetic, has permeated our minds, do you think we can expect to put together poems to be treated with oil of cedar and kept in cypress-wood cases?

Poets aim either to help or to amuse the reader, or to say what is pleasant and at the same time what is suitable. Whatever you have in the way of a lesson, make it short, so that impressionable minds can quickly grasp your words and hold them faithfully: every unnecessary word spills over and is lost to a heart that is already filled up to the brim.

Whatever you invent to please, see that it is close to truth, so your play does not require belief in anything it wants; do not have it pull a living child from Lamia's insides just after she has eaten lunch. (340)

The centuries of elders in the audience cannot stand a play that has no moral; the noble young gentlemen ignore an austere composition; but the writer who has combined the pleasant with the useful [*miscuit utile dulci*] wins on all points, by delighting the reader while he gives advice. This kind of book makes money for the Sosii [publishers], this kind of book is sold across the sea and prolongs the famous writer's age.

There are, however, faults which I should like to overlook: I mean that the string, when plucked, does not give forth the sound that heart and hand desire; it very often gives back a high note when one calls for a low; and the arrow does not always hit precisely the mark at which it aimed and threatened. (350) So, when most of the passages are brilliant, I am personally not bothered by blots, which

are spattered here and there by oversight or those which human nature failed to guard against enough.

Well, what's the point?

If a library copyist keeps on making the same mistake, even though he has been warned about it, there is no excuse for him, and a lyre player who always strikes the same sour note is laughed at; so a writer who is consistently sloppy is in a class with Choerilus — you know who I mean — whom I regard with amused admiration if he happens to write two or three good passages. Similarly, I think it's too bad whenever good old Homer dozes off, as he does from time to time, but when all is said and done, it is natural enough for drowsiness to creep up on a long job of writing. (360) A poem is like a painting: you will find a picture which will attract you more if you stand up close, another if you stand farther back. This picture favors shadow, another likes to be viewed in the light — neither has apprehensions about the keen perceptions of the good critic. Here's one that pleases you only once; here's another that you'll like if you come back to it ten times.

And now to address the older of the two of you: ah, even though your tastes have been formed to appreciate the right things by your father (as well as by others), and you have much good sense of your own, acknowledge what I am going to say and remember it: perfectly proper concessions are made to second-raters in certain fields. A second-rate legal authority and member of the bar (370) can be far from having the qualities of Messala, a very able speaker, and not be as learned as Cascellius Aulus, but still he has a certain value — *a second-rate poet gets no advertising posters from either men, gods, or booksellers.*

You know how music off-key grates on your nerves at an otherwise pleasant banquet, and greasy ointment for your hair, and bitter honey from Sardinia mixed with poppy seeds, because the banquet could be carried on without them. That is how it is with poetry: created and developed to give joy to human hearts; but if it takes one step down from the very highest point of merit, it slides all the way back to the bottom.

The lad who does not know how to take part in sports keeps out of the cavalry exercises in the Campus; and if he has not learned how to work with the ball, the disc or the hoop (380) — he sits where he is because he is afraid that the spectators, jammed together, will laugh at his expense — there will be nothing he can do about it. For all of that, the man who has no notion of how to compose poetry

has the nerve to go ahead anyhow. Why shouldn't he? After all, he's a free man and born free and what's more to the point, his income is in the top brackets — which puts him beyond criticism.

As for you, my boy, don't do or say anything that Minerva would not approve: that's your standard of judgment, that's your philosophy. However, if you ever do write something, see that it comes into court — to the ears of Maecius as critic, or your father's, or mine, and also see that it is weighted down in storage, put away between the leaves of parchment; you can always edit what you haven't published: the word that is uttered knows no return. (390)

Orpheus, a holy man and spokesman for the gods, forced the wild men of the woods to give up human killing and gruesome feasting; he is said, because of these powers, to soothe tigers and the raging of the lion; yes, and Amphion, the builder of the city of Thebes, is said to move rocks with his lyre and with the softness of song to lead them where he will.

I will tell you what was once the poet's wisdom: to decide what were public and what were private suits at law, to say what was sacred and what was not, to enjoin from sexual license, provide a code of conduct for marriage, to build up towns, and carve the laws on wooden tablets. This was the way honor and renown came to god-like poet-preachers and their songs. (400)

After these, Homer gained renown, and Tyrtæus with his verses whetted the spirits of males for Mars and war; oracles were given in the form of poems and the way of life was shown; the favor of kings was sought in Pierian strains; and dramatic festivals were invented and thus the end of a long task [of development] — in case the Muse in her lyric artistry and Apollo with his song embarrass you.

The question has been asked: is good poetry created by nature or by training?

Personally, I cannot see what good enthusiasm is or uncultivated talent without a rich vein of genius; (410) each requires the help of the other and forms a friendly compact. The would-be poet whose passion is to reach the hoped-for goal in this race for fame, has worked hard in boyhood and endured a great deal, has sweated and shivered, abstained from women and wine; the artist who plays the pipe at the Pythian games has first learned his art and lived in terror of a teacher. Nowadays it's enough to have said, "I beat out wonderful poems; the hell with the rest of the mob; it's a dirty deal for me to be left at the starting line and admit that I obviously don't know what I never learned."

Like a huckster who collects a crowd to buy his wares, the poet with his wealth in land, with wealth resting on coin put out at interest, tells yes-men to come to his readings for gain. (430) Yes, indeed; if there is a man who can set out a really fat banquet, and co-sign notes for irresponsible paupers, and save the neck of the client tangled in a murder trial, I'll be surprised if, for all his wealth, he can tell the difference between a liar and an honest friend! Whether you have already given someone a present or only expect to do so, don't let him near your verses when he's full of joy: I mean, he'll gush "Lovely! Great! Swell!" On top of this, he'll turn pale, he'll even squeeze drops of dew from sympathetic eyes, leap to his feet and stamp on the ground. (430)

The way hired mourners wail at a funeral and — so they say — carry on more painfully than those who sorrow quite sincerely, thus the critic with his tongue in cheek is more deeply moved than the ordinary flatterer. Rich men are said to keep pushing glasses of wine at, and to torment with wine poured straight, the man whom they are trying hard to see through — to see if he is worthy of friendship. If you will put together poems, motives disguised with a foxy expression will never deceive you.

If you were to read anything to Quintilius, "Change this, please," he kept saying, "and this." If you said you couldn't do better, you'd tried twice, three times, with no success, (440) Quintilius used to say to rub it out and put back on the anvil the lines that were spoiled on the lathe. If you preferred to defend your mistake, not revise it, he would not waste another word or go to more useless trouble to keep you from being your only friend, with no competitors.

A true critic and a wise one will scold you for weak lines, blame you for rough ones, he'll indicate unpolished lines with a black cross-mark made with his pen, he'll cut out pretentious embellishments, make you clarify obscure phrases, remove ambiguities, mark things to be changed, he'll turn into an Aristarchus, and he will not say, "Why should I hurt the feelings of a friend over these trifles?" (450) Well, these trifles will get you into serious trouble once you have been laughed down and given a poor reception.

As in the case of a man with a bad attack of the itch or inflammation of the liver or one who's offended Diana — he's moon-struck — everyone with any sense is afraid to touch the madman and keeps out of the way of the poet; small boys pester him and don't know any better than to follow him around. If, while burping out his lines and thinking they're sublime, he goes off the roadway, falls

into an excavation or a well, like a hunter intent on his blackbirds — he can yell so you can hear him a mile away, "Help! Hey, neighbors!" — no one would be worried about fishing him out. (460) If someone should get excited about rescuing him and let down a rope, I'll say, "How do you know that he didn't do it on purpose when he threw himself down there, and doesn't want to be rescued?" And I'll tell the story about the death of the Sicilian poet.

While he had a yearning to be regarded as an immortal god, Empedocles was cool enough to jump down into the red-hot crater of Aetna. Let poets have the right to perish; issue them a license! When you rescue a man against his will, you do the same as kill him. This isn't the first time he's done it, either; and if he's hauled out, he still won't behave like a human and give up his love of dying for publicity. And it isn't very clear, either, why he keeps on grinding out his verses, (470) whether he's used his father's funeral urn as a pisspot or whether he's tampered with the boundary markers of a holy plot of ground — an act of sacrilege. He's crazy, that's sure; and like a bear that's powerful enough to break the bars at the front of his cage, this dedicated elocutionist puts to flight the scholar and the layman without discrimination. Yes, and when he catches one, he'll hold on to him and recite him to death. You can be sure he won't let go of the hide of his victim until he's as full of blood as a leech.

Magnanimous Despair

Ugo Betti and The Queen and the Rebels

by FRANK W. WADSWORTH

Playwriting since the first World War has become a fragmented art and its triumphs as a result have often been unsatisfactory when viewed from the longer vantage of dramatic history. To a great extent this failure comes from the modern writer's compulsion to demonstrate mankind's shortcomings without even a perfunctory nod in the direction of its saving graces. This onesidedness has given contemporary drama an analytical quality that often disappoints us with its incompleteness if not with its inadequacy. Perhaps what is most lacking is meaningful sympathy. Today's plays, when they are not sentimental, are apt to be meretriciously artistical, overly intellectualized, or to have more power than purpose. The number of dramatists who have been at once homely, thoughtful and affective is indeed small. In the United States Eugene O'Neill achieved this kind of synthesis, but of American playwrights active today only Miller and Williams appear capable of a similar totality. Unfortunately Miller has long been silent and Williams is busy peopling the country with Calibans. Thus there is reason to rejoice that the American theatre is about to give serious attention to a dramatist whose virtues are precisely those so frequently lacking in the dramatic literature of the past few decades. Three plays by the late Italian dramatist, Ugo Betti, are scheduled for Broadway production within the next year. Theatregoers will find his work, unlike that of many foreign authors, emotionally and intellectually moving at the same time.

Two early New York flirtations with Betti were ill-advised. A minor piece, *The Gambler* (*Il giocatore*), was given an uninspired production in 1952, as was *Crime on the Island of Goats* (*Delitto all'Isola delle Capre*) in 1955. The latter, entitled *Goat Island*, simply proved too much for its director, who could not see the tragedy's subtle complexities and ended up stressing its sexuality to

the perturbation of a critical fraternity soon to greet *The Balcony* with undisguised enthusiasm. *Crime on the Island of Goats* is not one of Betti's easiest plays and possibly not one of his best. But with the choice of *The Queen and the Rebels* (*La Regina e gli insorti*), promised for the spring, one cannot quarrel. The tragedy represents Betti at his finest and has achieved striking successes abroad, particularly in London, where it added distinction to the career of Irene Worth, and in Paris where it supported Edwige Feuillère for two years.

Betti's inconspicuousness on the American theatrical scene is in startling contrast to his popularity in Great Britain and Europe, where his plays have been successful in radio and motion picture versions as well as in the theatre. Similarly, the ignorance of Betti's work revealed by American critics¹ (it is impossible to find more than minor notices) is directly opposed to his literary prestige in Europe. Not only are his plays the subject of much discussion in his native Italy, with both his detractors and defenders rising to heights of Latin eloquence to prove their points, but his poems also enjoy a considerable reputation. His work is well known in Germany and his fame has continued to grow in France and Great Britain to the point that he is now considered the rightful heir to Pirandello. And happily there are signs that at last even America is becoming aware of Ugo Betti, for in addition to Broadway's renewed interest, summer playhouses and college theatre groups have recently begun to experiment with his plays and these harbingers make the advent of a Betti vogue not at all unlikely.

Such an occurrence would be doubly significant, for Betti's life represents a concept of the playwright's role that is essentially foreign to us. Unlike most American dramatists, Betti engaged directly in the routine of practical living, subjoining his literary activity to a distinguished legal career. Not surprisingly, his work is touched with the peculiar humanity that comes from personal participation in, rather than merely passive observation of, the eruptive dramas of daily life. His lifelong devotion to the legal profession probably owes much to his youthful experiences in World War I when he was taken prisoner during the Italian defeat at Caporetto. He was languishing in an Austrian prison when he began to compose the lyric poetry that first brought him fame, and we may suppose that it was during this period of painful inactivity that the necessity of rooting his art in mankind's daily activities impressed itself upon him. With the war's end he plunged fully into the business of life, going even-

tually to Parma where he became a judge and finally moving on to Rome in the same capacity. He remained active in the legal profession until his death in 1953. He was buried in Camerino where he had been born sixty-one years earlier.

The harsh reality of the courtroom colored Betti's view of life and his literary work is typical of his era in its lack of facile optimism if not in its catholic sorrow. Despair has been the burden of most playwrights of the past quarter century and currently it is reaching a nervewracking pitch in the efforts of Ionesco, Genêt and Jack Gelber, to name three dramatists whose unhappiness has recently captivated New York. Behind the tortured masks of these and similar writers there is, of course, a dreadful uncertainty, but it is an uncertainty somehow not quite convincing, or at best a bit too strident, like the lament of a child, intense but not fully informed. A few playwrights, notably Beckett, Genêt, and at times Ionesco, achieve a powerful theatricality that provides a disturbing dramatic experience; we actually wince at the power with which they convey their awareness of life's meaninglessness. Yet something, we sense, is lacking, some steadying undercurrent of thoughtfulness that can oppose the swirling emotions upon the surface and reveal a profounder and therefore truer picture. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the absence of an articulated moral or rational frame of reference results ultimately in our feeling tricked; we have been moved by an experience that we do not and cannot understand, except in terms of a limited view of human nature which even in these troubled times seems unnecessarily onesided. It is Ugo Betti's virtue that while he views life with the pessimism typical of the most sensitive writers of his era he never quite loses confidence in the essential dignity of mankind, a confidence unusual in a theatre inclined today to see man as an abomination. Like the author of *King Lear*, Betti can recognize the terrors of the world without completely losing faith in its inhabitants. In the Preface to his first play, *The Mistress (La Padrona)*, he states his credo in words which recall Stevenson's "Pulvis et Umbra."

We are all poor, uneasy creatures, and we would like at least to understand the purpose of the huge, bizarre incongruity between what our existence is, and what it ought to be according to the mind that was given us; the purpose of this marvellous calm iniquity which is life. We are uneasy creatures distinguished from the indifference of the universe by one mark only: precisely this anxiousness that we alone possess for something that may be called harmony, that may be called justice; and this obscure

feeling that only we possess of being instead oppressed by an unjust condemnation that lies not so much without as within every one of us, that with terrifying and equal naturalness gives rise to joy and goodness in some of us, to pain and evil in others, that makes some of us like the harmonious strings of a vast harp, others harsh and bitter forever.

This faith is dramatized most strikingly in *The Queen and the Rebels*, where a selfless act of will shines brightly in a world otherwise evil, selfish and shorn of traditional values.

From the point of view of his dramaturgy Betti is also significant. With their vividly human quality his plays recall the rich, complex texture of Miller's and Williams' best work more than the simpler patterns of most European playwrights. Continental drama has tended recently to be presentational, but Betti typically builds upon a firm foundation of concrete, realistic action, coloring this with an admixture of theatricalism which both deepens and broadens the implications of the basic dramatic movement much as do the non-representational interludes of *Death of a Salesman*. His theatricalism ranges from such obvious devices as the appearance of dead men at the trial in *Landslide at the North Station* (*Frana allo Scalo Nord*) to the subtle undertones of *The Queen and the Rebels*, where Christian allegory points up the parallels between the heroine's sacrifice and Christ's Passion. In addition, the voice of Betti the poet is frequently allowed to break the realistic illusion, being especially noticeable in the verbal richness of parts of the dialogue and in the long flights of poetic rhetoric with which certain characters are indulged.

Both his view of humanity and his dramatic methods are revealed in *The Queen and the Rebels* (1949).² More severely realistic than some of the earlier dramas, it nevertheless embodies Betti's fundamental approach to theatre, while revealing those thematic qualities responsible for his unusual distinction among recent dramatists. As so often with Betti, the essential narrative is richly melodramatic. Among the travelers detained by a group of unidentified revolutionists is Argia, a young woman whose unsavory activities have included prostitution. The rebels are searching for the widow of the head of the regular government, the "Queen" of the play's title. One of the searchers is Raim, Argia's former lover, to whom she is now fleeing. After some desultory conversation the most reticent traveler is revealed as Amos, a revolutionary commissar charged with apprehending the Queen. Thus when Argia learns more or less

inadvertently that the frightened peasant woman traveling with her is really the Queen she suddenly finds herself an active participant in the political intrigue. Her first impulse is a selfish one; she informs Raim of the peasant woman's identity and together they scheme to blackmail the fleeing widow's friends, whose names they have frightened out of her. Not until Argia realizes that Raim also intends to send the Queen to her death does she have any qualms about her actions. At the last moment she tries to save the Queen, who escapes, is soon recaptured, and commits suicide. Raim, too, dies, killed trying to flee as his plan for extortion is about to be exposed. Thus the two people who know the peasant woman's identity are dead, a fact of tragic significance, for the commissar and his associates are slowly coming to believe that Argia herself is the sought-for Queen. This impression, first engendered by Argia's ironic haughtiness, is strengthened when the embittered girl, realizing their error, finds herself playing a regal role with increasing enjoyment. Too late she realizes her mistake; although Amos senses the truth, he now wants the masquerade to continue so that the supposed Queen can sign a self-abasing and politically useful confession. Argia is fully conscious by now of the terrible danger of her own situation. However, the pathetic presence of the real Queen's small son creates a tragic awareness of the emptiness of her life, causing her to discover a new dignity within herself and to refuse to sign the false confession. She resolves to die nobly as the Queen, hoping that by her act she will have endowed life with meaning. As Argia makes the irrevocable decision, she says:

And so, not utterly bereft, but with a little coin I go before Him. . . . Only a little, but my own; not given to me, not inherited; but mine. . . . I go away rich. I have acquired a son . . . and memories. . . . If even a little memory survives in us, this night, for me, shall shine indeed.

The story of *The Queen and the Rebels* is potentially sensational, but Betti's actual handling of it is not. Typically, the action is set in an unnamed country during an unspecified time. The set, a large town hall, is severely simple. The play begins with some stylized characters — an Engineer, a Traveller, a Porter — speaking stiffly and platitudinously. Gradually certain figures are brought into clearer focus. As they engage in a sordid lovers' quarrel Argia and Raim take on new dimensions, becoming sharply etched individuals. So too with the Queen and her terrible fears. But for all their realistic surfaces the other key characters — servants of an impersonal

state — remain detached, stylized. There is the wounded General Bianti, a more terrifying if less human Bolingbroke; the savage Maupa (the beast without which no revolution can succeed), who wants "to see the colour of the Queen's entrails"; the timid Porter who hungers for an age of lost heroes. Even Amos, Argia's antagonist, functions primarily as an eloquent mouthpiece for revolution. Thus the conflict, man versus nameless collectivism, is heightened by the interplay of two kinds of characters, and Betti's almost casual intermingling of realistic and stylized elements is seen to be truly poetic in design. Similarly, Betti does not shrink from rhetorical dialogue and his characters can be more eloquent than strict realism would allow. Amos' thoughtful speeches give meaning to otherwise melodramatic moments, and Argia reveals an unexpected verbal felicity at times. Amos, in particular, is responsible for the constant strain of irony which sustains the action. When the Engineer complains about the stench of decaying corpses, Amos remarks laconically that "It's the smell of history." Urging Argia to reveal the names extorted from the Queen, he tells her:

The blood that your disclosures will make flow may be a great deal, but it will be far away. There is only a little here. But it is warm. And it is your own.

Betti's realism relieved by the devices of theatricalism results in a rich and complex dramatic texture. As much as Jean Genêt, he is aware of life's evils. His heroine is no soft-hearted prostitute from the pages of sentimental fiction, but a scheming, sexually debased woman who has not hesitated to sell herself as bait for the traps of the secret police (a character not unexpected from the author of so gripping a study of sexual degeneration as *Crime on the Island of Goats*). Betti's view of human nature is unfashionable only in that it entails a belief in man's responsibility for bringing about the harmony implicit in the universe. Argia dies because she realizes that one must fully accept one's role as a human being in order to give significance to life. Through an act of will she becomes a person, finding salvation in a Sartrean effort of commitment.

The comparison with Sartre is revealing. Unlike *The Flies*, which presents the struggle between servile order and individual freedom so completely in terms of black and white that Sartre's arguments lose force, *The Queen and the Rebels* views historical conflict with sorrowful compassion for both sides. In *The Flies* Zeus and his creature Aegisthus are painted with grotesque lack of sympathy and as a

result the ideas for which they stand are often too unreal to be convincing. Betti on the other hand gives the enemy his due, and Amos, like Anouilh's Creon, is no villain. He is a practical but not ungentle man, a supreme but far from callous realist. When Amos comprehends that Argia cannot be dissuaded from her suicidal assumption of the role of the Queen, he admits defeat by telling her, "If you believe in the survival of your soul, and desire a confessor, anyone you choose may hear you." Significantly, when the child's usefulness has ended, he allows the Queen's son to return to his safe anonymity after first having covered the boy's ears to protect him from the sound of the guns that shoot down Argia. And, like Creon, he can speak eloquently for those things he believes in, giving to the concept of social revolution a beautiful passion which reminds us in our complacency that our enemies are also capable of idealism. Even Henry Reed's occasionally stiff and awkward English translation cannot diminish the excitement of Amos' words. Describing the looting of the Queen's palace, he cries that the looters' faces "were furious, they were intoxicated, they were beautiful, they were holy." After picturing the holocaust, he continues:

But it would have been contemptible if the aim of it all was merely to take a few pence from the hand of a fat dead man and put them in the hand of a thin living man. So much noise simply in order to modify a few tariffs and initiate a few austere apostles into the pleasures of wearing silk shirts? But this fury, which spouts up like a fountain of black oil, comes from deep down, madam, it's the distillation of a very different grief, the memory of a very different betrayal, it doesn't merely utter its "no" to your silks and satins and the farmer's hoard. (*He cries*) It says "no" to everything there is! It says rage towards everything, despair towards everything! What we hear coming towards us down there, is the thunder of the great waterfall! It's towards the great rapids that the boat is rushing! This fury says "no" to the whole world: it says: (*with despairing weariness*) that the world is wrong, it's all absurdity; an immense, unchangeable quarry of despair, a grotesque, unchangeable labyrinth of injustice, an insensate clockwork, that one day compels you and me to say and do what we're saying and doing now. It says "no"; total sterilisation; away with everything: the just and the unjust, loyalty and betrayal, worthiness, guilt, glory: (*He points to ARGIA.*) . . . everything that makes us grasping and boastful owners in life and in death, all this mass of falsehoods, this immense fraud!

In a similar vein Betti preserves an ironic detachment towards his heroine. To cite just one instance: as Argia prepares to walk to

her death before the revolutionary firing squad, she remarks that she is "sinning still; since of what I have done tonight I am a little proud." A moment later she pauses and paints her lips, because "My mouth was rather pale." For many dramatists Argia's action would be no more than a melodramatic gesture, a touch reminiscent of Sidney Carton's romantic insouciance. But Betti has used it to enhance his tragic view of life. Cosmetics have been made a symbol of Argia's shabby, whorish pride. She had recognized the peasant woman as she was beginning her nightly beauty treatment, and her betrayal of the Queen whose image she is now trying to preserve had come with her face grotesquely covered with cold cream. Thus there is a percipient irony in Argia's announcing her salvation with this symbolic gesture. Her final lines are:

How lovely and serene it is over the mountains; and the star
Diana is still there in the sky. Unquestionably, this is a seat for
kings, and in it we must try to live regally.

"Diana," "regally," "My mouth was rather pale" — what could have been merely a melodramatic curtain becomes a moment rich in the ironic contradictions of the human spirit.

From formal allegory to delicate nuance, Betti's plays abound in symbolism. In *The Queen and the Rebels* the Christ image suggestively enriches the final scenes. Arraigned before a mock tribunal, Argia is guarded by the soldier Maupa who wants to see the color of the Queen's entrails, and is vilified by a chorus of false witnesses incited by Amos who, significantly, had once actually been a priest. She is "denied" by the Porter, who admires her but fears to speak up. Raim's desertion and the peasant woman's death have left Argia totally alone, and as she accepts the role of the Queen she takes the world's sins upon herself in an act of sacrifice that inevitably calls to mind the Crucifixion. Yet it is a subtle shadowing, the symbolic lipstick reminding us that mankind is as close to the beast as to the angel.

Just as Betti's melodrama is muted, so is there little sentimentality in the play. Life for him, as for Genêt, Beckett, or Ionesco, is a grim absurd affair, a bitter struggle waged by people who "don't believe in equality; except over toothpicks" and hope only "to get rich, little by little." The despair that is so much a part of modern drama is clearly present, but in Betti's case it is a nobler sentiment, based upon a deep if hidden pride in mankind and on the conviction that man, any man, is capable of something better. Thus, inevitably,

The Queen and the Rebels is a tragedy in the classic manner. It has a stark, simple quality, emphasized by the slightly stylized laconicness of the dialogue, and underscored by Betti's strict observance of the unities of time, place, and action. In the last analysis it is not Argia's sacrifice that bespeaks Betti's view of life, but the firm architectonics of his drama which reflect his innate belief in the meaning of life as surely as the chaos of a Ionesco play reflects hopelessness. Betti's voice deserves to be heard, not only because he has deepened and amplified the chords of realistic drama by his poetic approach, but also because he speaks with positive power at a time when too many dramatists can chant only the threnody of passive despair.

When he wrote *The Queen and the Rebels* in 1949 Betti was nearing the end of a remarkably full literary career, remarkable when one remembers that his writing was always secondary to his legal labors, being done in the early hours of the morning when his professional duties had been completed. He had already written a novel and three volumes each of poems and short stories in addition to his plays, which with the four still to come would number twenty-five at his death. All his work is marked by an acute sensitivity to man's suffering. In his early plays he tended to view human misery largely as an outgrowth of a destructive sexuality, creating obsessed characters of Jacobean intenseness, and this aspect of experience remains a major theme in his work although it never becomes monomania as with Williams. *The Mistress* (1926), his first play, is built around the unhappy relationship of two women and a man. A sick young girl clinging frantically to life spitefully informs her father that her sensual stepmother has been untrue to him, with the result that the husband murders his wife in a meaningless act of revenge. In its elemental realism *The Mistress* portrays love as an animal urge — powerful, brutal, and degrading. Yet even here, in his earliest drama, Betti moves beyond the confines of strict representationalism, creating in the vigorous Marina and the sickly Anna clearly discernible symbols of Life and Death.

Although presented less starkly, the theme of sexuality dominates Betti's next three plays, particularly *The House on the Water* (*La casa sull'acqua*: 1928) where in the original version a woman becomes the murderer of a young girl fascinated by her husband's masculinity, and *A Hotel on the Water Front* (*Un albergo sul porto*: 1930), a sordid drama of life in a hotel for transient derelicts. It reappears again in *Husband and Wife* (*Marito e moglie*: 1943), a Turgenyev-like tale about the tragic impact of a handsome youth

upon a seemingly secure if unromantic marriage, and in the startling *Irene the Innocent* (*Irene innocente*: 1946). In the latter the father of a crippled girl invites the men of the village to his daughter's bed in order to afford her the sexual satisfaction she is otherwise denied; his actions inevitably lead to unhappiness and death. However, Betti's most significant study of sexual hunger is *Crime on the Island of Goats* (1948). It is a play which simplifies and intensifies the dramatic situation of the earlier *Husband and Wife*, but its affinities are not with *A Month in the Country* so much as with Williams' *Orpheus Descending*. A virile young stranger appears in the midst of three women living alone on an island. Seducing in turn the widow, her sister-in-law and the widow's daughter, he is punished for his actions when the women, in an agony of shame, refuse to rescue him after he has been accidentally trapped at the bottom of a dry well. But *Crime on the Island of Goats* is a far more thoughtful play than *Orpheus Descending*, particularly in its existentialist wrestling with the problem of human responsibility, as when Agata muses over the trapped and dying Angelo:

There is a point at which we choose what we are. It is at the beginning; nothing yet exists, all is free; and the eye turns to give thanks and to be glad, or else to the other side. From there it begins. However, there is always a certain peace in being what one is, in being it completely: the condemned man has that happiness. I accept.

Furthermore, the tragic complications of sexual passion are treated without the romantic grotesquerie that mars Williams' drama, while Betti's verbal imagery and dramatic allegory have a subtlety not found in the American play.

The problem of responsibility was one with which Betti had attempted to come to grips as early as 1932 when he wrote *Landslide at the North Station*, the play whose production in 1936 established him as a major figure in the Italian theatre. In dramatizing the investigation of an industrial accident which has caused several deaths, Betti combines the chilling inevitability we currently associate with Friedrich Dürrenmatt with the great sympathy that so beautifully modulates the conflict between Amos and Argia in *The Queen and the Rebels*. When the trial begins, the evidence seems clearly to indicate the guilt of the contractor, Gaucker, whose veneer of respectable decency is relentlessly stripped away. But as Gaucker's greed and selfishness become increasingly apparent, a new and confusing factor enters the case in the person of Kurz, a mysterious man

who is the real power behind Gaucker. But even the extent of Kurz's guilt is not beyond dispute, and the only "fact" that emerges from the investigation is that life is uncertain and painful. To emphasize this lack of certitude Betti again departs from the representational mode and brings in the dead victims to testify — ineffectually — as to the causes of the accident. The magistrate, who must judge the accused, has been forced by the trial to undergo an excruciating re-assessment of his own life, for in the emerging image of the inhumane contractor, whom he had known as a boy, he increasingly sees a reflection of himself. Moved by his awareness of life's unhappiness, the judge refuses to pass sentence, and when pressed, can only say:

We declare that these men pronounced, that every day they themselves pronounce, with their lives, with their suffering, the right sentence: they themselves found their own certitude. And that perhaps from the hands of the judge they ought to have something else, something higher — mercy, pity.

As the curtain falls, the spectators at the trial murmur "Pietà . . . Pietà . . .," echoing the cry of the anguished judge. From, we assume, the limbec of his own judicial experience, Betti has distilled a powerful testament to human misery and to the inadequacy of human justice. The need for pity will engage his attention from now on, and his treatment of the theme will be marked by another of his tragic perceptions — that the pain is made more intense by mankind's jealous and often irrational grip on life. Betti's awareness of this human paradox of holding on fiercely to that which is despised underscores *The Queen and the Rebels*. It is seen in the characters of Argia, the Porter, and General Bianti, but most poignantly in the terrified Queen who, to save her life, has suffered even the indignity of carrying a peasant's child in her womb.

The relationship of good and evil and the problem of justice that this relationship implies were never far from Betti's mind and he continued to treat them in such difficult and highly intellectualized allegories as *The Duck Hunter* (*Il Cacciatore d'anitre*: 1934) and *Night in the House of a Rich Man* (*Notte in casa del ricco*: 1938). Neither of these plays is wholly satisfactory as a work of dramatic art, but each is profoundly thoughtful and *The Duck Hunter*, particularly, is interesting for a concept of tragic suffering which looks ahead to Camus' belief in the virtue of opposition to an implacable world. However, no such guarded optimism marks *Inspezione* (*Ispezione*: 1942), probably Betti's most thoroughly disillusioned

play. But it is seen again in the very fine *Corruption at the Palace of Justice* (*Corruzione al Palazzo di Giustizia*: 1944) which anatomizes a diseased tribunal, stripping the magistrates in a corrupt town of their respectability in order to reveal the moral rotteness underneath. The judges, who are charged with heinous if unnamed crimes, gradually expose their own wickedness through their efforts to fasten the blame on others. Cust, the most ambitious, skilfully manages to create an impression of innocence and is appointed president of the court. But he cannot forget the people he has destroyed, particularly a girl he drove to suicide, and in an effort to find spiritual peace he voluntarily confesses his sins. Betti's insistence upon the importance of action recalls again his closeness to the Existentialists in spite of his ultimate refusal to deny God. This affinity is also seen in *Duel Until Dawn* (*Lotta fino all'alba*: 1945), and in *The Gambler* (1950) where the central figure has allowed his wife to be denounced as a spy and shot. The accused man is acquitted through the cleverness of his lawyer, but having won a legal victory is left with a more difficult struggle involving his own conscience.

It was inevitable that an Italian dramatist concerned with human conduct in an alien and unfriendly world should respond to the influence of Pirandello. Although the Pirandellian conflict of illusion and reality is present in most of Betti's work, it achieves its clearest focus in *Night Wind* (*Il vento notturno*: 1941) where a man and a woman use an imagined father-daughter relationship as a shield between themselves and the harsh realities of their everyday lives. Their desperate need to assume protective roles, a need so great that the mask eventually becomes the face, recalls the older dramatist's *Henry IV*, as also does Betti's later play, *Spiritism in the Old House* (*Spiritismo nell'antica casa*: 1947). And it is this same tragic search for identity which provides the central unity of *The Queen and the Rebels*. The political context in which Argia's search takes place may make it appear that the tragedy indicates a significant shift in Betti's view of life. But actually only the setting is new; the basic ideas reflect Betti's lifelong concerns. As the most effective synthesis of his major themes, *The Queen and the Rebels* marks the culmination of Ugo Betti's career as a dramatist.

By moving into the vaster arena of international tensions at the close of his career Betti paralleled the expanding vision of a number of contemporary European dramatists. His most explicit political comment is contained in *The Burnt Flower-bed* (*L'aiuola bruciata*:

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1951-2), written a year before his death. Argia has become Giovanni, a retired political leader and the dupe of former colleagues who plan to use his death as a pretext for starting another war. In his effort to escape, Giovanni allows a young girl to sacrifice her life for him, a sacrifice that results in his own reluctant recognition of the impossibility of avoiding human responsibility. As in *The Queen and the Rebels*, a selfless action redeems an otherwise meaningless world. The faceless evil of totalitarianism is brilliantly communicated by an unseen rifleman who waits across a mountain pass with orders to fire at the first person crossing the threshold of Giovanni's house. Too distant to see anything but the white flag the victim is supposed to be carrying, he becomes a frightening symbol of impersonal efficiency and an effective contrast to the tragically uncertain and therefore tragically human men and women within the house.

The Burnt Flower-bed, like *The Queen and the Rebels*, is one of the finest dramatic treatments of the conflict between a collectivist society and the lonely, defiant individual to be written in our day. However, it lacks the formal perfection that distinguishes the earlier play, and thus is inferior to it. *The Queen and the Rebels* embodies in its own artistic design the beauty and dignity of the human spirit. It is fashionable today to approve of the fragmented and the casual. *The Queen and the Rebels* reminds us that even though chaos has come again, high seriousness and a formal ordering of experience are still not impossible.

NOTES

1. A defect slightly remedied now by the editors of *Tulane Drama Review*, who recently (Vol. 5, No. 2, 1960) published a number partly devoted to Betti.
2. See *Three Plays by Ugo Betti*, translated by Henry Reed (Grove Press, 1956). In addition to *The Queen and the Rebels* the volume contains *The Burnt Flower-bed* (1951-2), a political drama, and *Summertime* (1937), a pleasantly undistinguished comedy representative of a brief period when Betti turned to lighter and happier themes. *Crime on the Island of Goats* has also been translated by Reed but the translation is not yet available in the United States.

A Half Century of Scandinavian Drama

by RICHARD B. VOWLES

(This essay is to appear shortly as the introduction to the American-Scandinavian Foundation's *Modern Scandinavian Plays, Fifth Series*, and is printed here with the permission of the Foundation.)

The heritage of August Strindberg is apparent in such writers as O'Neill, Williams, Cocteau, and Adamov, but it displays itself with greater purity of definition and clarity of contour in the playwright's native Sweden. There, fifty years after his death, we may observe an unmistakable continuity of expressionistic tradition, at least of what might be called symbolic abstraction, from the later, post-Inferno Strindberg to the present day. It is an abstraction that largely manifests itself as (1) the fractionation of character, where the people of the play are deliberately partial, representing as they do one aspect or force or component of behavior, instead of the whole, closed view of man; (2) the atmosphere of dream where anything can and does happen, bringing with it a new psychological utility and a new fluidity of theatrical form; and (3) a somber search for the meaning of existence. The descent may be traced from Strindberg through the morality drama of Pär Lagerkvist, the marionette plays of Hjalmar Bergman, the surrealism of Stig Dagerman down to the extraordinarily ductile imagination reflected in the films of Ingmar Bergman and the Martinson-Lindegren-Blomdahl space opera *Aniara* (1959).

It is characteristic of the austere discipline imposed upon himself, that Pär Lagerkvist (1891-) should write two literary manifestoes in 1914 and 1918, and then, with never a return to criticism, proceed to fulfill his commitments in a rigorous way. In "Modern Theatre" (1918) he argues that realism denies the very *raison d'être* of the theatre and calls for free play of fantasy: "Ibsen may be passed by, like a milestone with Roman numerals, but Strindberg is in the middle of the highway, and the only way to pass is to understand him and what he signified." Furthermore, Lagerkvist rejected the interior decoration of Max Reinhardt and Gordon Craig and, indeed,

all stylization, external and internal, as "the enemy of art and the threatening apparition of our time." What he wanted was a new simplicity and an inner spirituality, albeit one reflecting an age of anguish, an age out of joint.

In a sense all of Lagerkvist's fifteen plays are foreshadowed in *Heaven's Secret* (*Himlens hemlighet*, 1919). Against an enormous blue-black cyclorama God is represented as an old man sawing wood and Love as a distraught Ophelia playing a stringless guitar. The gallery of grotesques is enlarged by an ape-like executioner in flesh-colored tights, busy decapitating dolls, a fawning dwarf in oversized clothes, and others merely maimed, halt, or blind. For such is the way of the contemporary world.

Lagerkvist's subsequent plays have been a series of almost primeval, cultist rites and depersonalizations in the direction of the human spirit, or the Invisible. And surely Per Lindberg is right. The Swedish theatrical director who began the series of bold abstractions of the stage developed and refined by Olaf Molander and Alf Sjöberg, has made the observation that the shoemaker protagonist of Lagerkvist's *He Who Lived His Life Over* (*Han som fick leva om sitt liv*, 1928) is "a variant of the Invisible." We are not dealing simply with the life relived, of a man come back to this world trailing clouds of horror after a crime committed in a prior existence; or with a division of the ego into the good man pursuing his craft and cultivating honorable domesticity, and the evil, earlier self which could murder and then feverishly exult in his release from the bondage of prison. We are not preoccupied merely with a determinism of character wherein the dark strain must assert itself, if not by repetition of the murder by suicide of the son. Our concern is the projection and stripping of the ego, in the framework of the agonized, lyrical oratorio that is so characteristic of Lagerkvist. "A man's own life. It's something he never has a chance to live." So says Daniel's dark self, and that is the message of this parable of blood and violence.

Lagerkvist's *doppelgängerei* may very well hark back to Hjalmar Bergman (1883-1931). If not so intense a playwright, Bergman was much more versatile. Before he died in 1931, he had written the urbane comedy *Swedenhielms* (1925), a curious conflation of Ibsen and Noel Coward; *Dollar* (1926), a satire on America based on Bergman's misadventures in Hollywood; and the popular comedy of errors *Joe & Co.* (*Patrasket*, 1928). But his expressionistic side is also plainly apparent in the political abstractions of *The Door* (*Porten*, 1923) and the oriental grotesqueries of *The Weaver of*

Bagdad (*Vävaren i Bagdad*, 1923) which latter play should be classified with the Čapek brothers' *Insect Comedy* and Tennessee Williams' *Camino Real* and may in fact be mildly indebted to Strindberg's *Abu Casem's Slippers* (*Abu casems tofflor*, 1908). In *A Shadow* (*En skugga*, 1916) Bergman effectively merges two themes, that of youth mated (or about to be mated) with old age, which he earlier the same year used in his most famous one-acter *Mr. Sleeman Is Coming* (*Herr Sleeman kommer*, 1916), and the symbolic splitting of personality. The youthful Erik spends the bride's last unencumbered night prior to marriage, with her, while the aging, suspicious bridegroom lurks outside the door with the bride's mother. In the morning, before attempting to elope with Vera, as the bride is called, Erik tries to dismiss his servant who has guarded the rendezvous. Though the two are separate personalities, it is clear that Bergman intends to represent man's better self dismissing his base, evil self. The evil self wins and stabs Erik, leaving him in an ugly sprawl on the bride's bed. The affinity with Lagerkvist's *Han som fick leva om sitt liv* is striking.

Stig Dagerman (1923-1954) is chiefly remembered today for the attenuated naturalism of his novel *Burnt Child* (*Bränt barn*, 1948) and for the incandescence of a literary life that burnt itself out in suicide at the age of 31. Of his three plays *The Condemned* (*Den dödsdömde*, 1949) is an eclectic merger of expressionism and surrealism. Dagerman's hero has been innocently condemned to death for the murder of his wife. A delay in the execution permits discovery of the real culprit, the wife's lover. The Condemned Man upon release is welcomed by the same Rescued Man's Club that previously despised him, a curious assemblage reminiscent of the banqueteers in Strindberg's *Road to Damascus II*. As it happens, however, a combination of fatigue, despair, and desire to avenge his wife's sex makes him murder the trollop supplied for his amusement by the Club. While the motivation for this final act has not been adequately prepared for, Dagerman does convey the essentially expressionistic idea that man is trapped in a world where no real justice prevails. The madness of the world is that justice does not depend on fact but on the whims of public opinion, and the play gives formal shape to that madness. It was Dagerman's apparent intent to continue in the expressionistic manner, for his surviving notes indicate he was plotting a novel with such characters as The Judge, The Devil, The Bride, The Evil One, and The Fire Woman.

The surrealistic strain of Swedish theatre continues in Ingmar

Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1958), but what is more significant is the atmosphere of the medieval morality play that shapes *The Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957) and *Virgin Spring* (*Jungfrukällan*, 1960) and so much of Bergman's deep moral sensibility. It is an extension of Lagerkvist's medievalism, the alehouse tableau of *The Hangman* (*Bödeln*, 1934) and the conflict between flesh and spirit in *The Philosopher's Stone* (*Den vises sten*, 1947). We are reminded that Lagerkvist saw in our era, "in its fury, in its madness and its ecstasy something of the Gothic spirit, in its lack of measure, balance, and harmony something of the complex being of the Middle Ages."

There is nothing medieval about *Aniara* however; indeed its renown lies in its modernity, in the fact that it is the first opera of the space age. *Aniara* depicts the life of eight thousand passengers on a stratocruiser which gets out of its path and plunges for twenty-five years to oblivion. Space, with its cold, glass-like clarity, is a metaphor for meaninglessness, the contemporary intellectual vacuum where, as Harry Martinson conceives it, we cannot survive. The space ship's Mima, a cross between an electronic brain, a TV screen, Jung's collective subconscious, and perhaps Mimir's well of Norse mythology, symbolizes the world of art which transmits the extinction of the earth to the passengers and then itself gives up the ghost. The calculated dissonance, dislocation, and depersonalization of *Aniara* are an extrapolation of expressionism, if not an example of it. Similarly, Ingmar Bergman is by no means an expressionist in the restricted sense, but his violence and spirituality are close to the primeval qualities of both Strindberg and Lagerkvist. If Bergman some day films *A Dream Play*, as he confesses a desire to do, the wheel will have come full circle.

II

In Denmark the contemporary theatre has had less to do with the lonely, brooding spirit of man, and more to do with his social harmony and escape from convention. Its fluid and experimental dramatic forms are also expressionistic, but they derive less from the lyrical than from the satirical drift on the continent, exemplified by Kaiser, Kornfeld, Apel, Toller, and Unruh. The distorted stage picture is therefore much more a function and desideratum of modern Danish drama than of Swedish, although it escapes ponderous acrimony by virtue of the essential wit and playfulness of Danish char-

acter. Cartoon backdrops, colorful design, and revue continuity are characteristic of a dominant area of contemporary Danish drama.

Were it not for a few cases of obvious influence from Germany, it might even be argued that the satiric expressionism of Denmark is an entirely indigenous development. The tradition of a living theatre goes further back in Denmark than in the other Scandinavian countries and it is a comic tradition. The prevailing mode is traceable from Ludvig Holberg's satires of provincial types through Johan Heiberg's vaudeville plays and Gustaf Wied's comedies of manners to the plays of Kjeld Abell and Soya. It is not at all astonishing that the one theologian who has brilliantly penetrated the comic dilemma of modern man is a Dane. Søren Kierkegaard was a dramatic theorist of high order, and, indeed, his strategies of the pseudonymous guise display a bent for dramatic irony. As Wylie Sypher has demonstrated (in *Comedy*, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), Kierkegaard's speculations on comedy complement and extend the theories of Meredith and Bergson, though he preceded them in time.

Other shaping forces should be mentioned, namely the *commedia dell'arte* and the musical revue. Holberg's penchant for *commedia* types has been frequently noted, and, as any visitor to Copenhagen knows, the *commedia* is perpetuated nightly at Tivoli, in the heart of the city. Furthermore, Pirandello's exploration of the metaphysical uses of *commedia* improvisation has been clearly absorbed by the Danish theatre. Musical revue has long been dear to the Danes as a manifestation of the free and critical spirit, and its exuberance has frequently infiltrated formal drama.

In 1919, Svend Borberg (1888-1947), reacting against a naturalism that in fact never took root in indigenous Danish theatre, called for a drama that was "great, symbolic, and Dionysian;" and thereupon proceeded to a Freudian dissection of the identity of a post-World War I soldier in his play *Nobody* (*Ingen*, 1920, prod. 1923). With him Bertel Budtz Müller (1890-1946), leader of the Worker's Theatre from 1924 to 1928, was instrumental in the introduction of German expressionism to Denmark. But far more important to the twenties was Sven Clausen (1893-), professor of jurisprudence and a language reformer, who wrote influential plays like *The Juryman* (*Naevningen*, 1929), which presents three versions of a crime as they are seen in the mind of a member of the jury; *The Ages of Man* (*Menneskets aldre*, 1930), a kaleidoscopic review of a dying man's life in a 16-scene fantasy; and *Among Garlands of*

Roses (*I rosenlaenker*, 1933), a playful marital comedy in which the *commedia* characters Pierrot, Columbine, and Harlequin are the vehicles.

The instantaneous and sustained success of Kjeld Abell (1901-1961) best typifies the drama of the thirties and forties. It is elegant, urbane, and sophisticated, somewhat after the fashion of Giraudoux. Nothing is more endearing about the Danes than their cultivation of a happy domesticity. But the *hyggelig*, the "comfy," can easily settle into self-satisfaction and unimaginative complacency, the kind of thing that Abell is attacking in his debut comedy *The Melody That Got Lost* (*Melodien der blev vaek*, 1935) in which the "melody" is the vital energy suppressed by bourgeois business and family conventions. The play is an absolute delight of expressionistic fancy, for which Abell, trained as a stage artist, himself did the sets.

On the other hand Abell never lost sight of the debt of the individual to society, stressed in such an anti-fascist play as *Anna Sophia Hedvig* (1939), and in *Silkeborg* (1946), a tribute to the underground fighters of World War II. Man cannot relax into passivism and a morbid infatuation with suicide, Abell argues in *Days on a Cloud* (*Dage på en sky*, 1947), an intellectual projection of the thoughts of a scientist after he bails out of a plane and before he finally decides to open his parachute. The conflict takes the form of a debate between the barbaric and the domesticated gods of Greek mythology encountered on a cloud. The civilized gods summon the scientist's wife who reminds him of his responsibility to society, and he makes a happy landing. Woman represents strength and the positive virtues, as is so often the case with Abell, in this rich verbal and visual agglomerate of a play.

The Blue Pekingese (*Den blå pekingeser*, 1954) is likewise a projection of the protagonist's mind. André sits in a café reading a letter full of suicidal intent from a boyhood sweetheart, Tordis, who lives in isolation on an island. Unable to telephone her because of bad weather, André imagines a conversation with her and conjures up a variety of characters, living and dead, including Tordis' aunt who was said to have, of all things, a blue Pekingese. This curious, invisible beast symbolizes the *élan vital*, according to Abell's whimsy; and the play ultimately conveys the idea of men's responsibility one to another. Kjeld Abell died last March. A member of the Danish Academy and one of the directors of Tivoli, he was also at his death Denmark's finest playwright. His highly theatrical moral sensibility will be missed.

The playwright who simply goes by the name of "Soya" (1896-) has much in common with Abell, except that he takes delight in sensation, shock, and the macabre, occasionally even in realistic terms, and his comparable humanitarian impulse is tempered by scepticism. His most popular exercise in the expressionistic mode is *Who Am I?* (*Hvem er jeg?*, 1932), in which one of Soya's many projections of self, the magician and psychoanalyst Dr. Paprika, conjures up the life story of Hans Christian, a younger version of Elmer Rice's Mr. Zero. Hans Christian, engaged to the poor, simple Mary who is about to bear his child, is tempted away from her in the direction of the rich girl, Lillian, to whom he also, and almost simultaneously, becomes engaged. What to do? Dr. Paprika exposes the struggle in Hans Christian's subconscious in a kind of fanciful board meeting in which the Devil, the Virgin Mary, the Professor, the Ape, the Grey Man, and Blue Beard debate the hero's proper conduct under the circumstances. Mary obliges her one-time lover's wishful thinking, incited by the Devil, and crashes to her death in an elevator. But Dr. Paprika mercifully resuscitates her and the couple embrace in a setting of angelic voices and Bengalese fire. Not done with the fantastic roundtable, Soya wrote *Lord Nelson Lays Aside His Figleaf* (*Lord Nelson laegger figenbladet*, 1934) in which the assemblage, this time historical, included Cleopatra, Madame Récamier, Lenin, Socrates, Nietzsche, and of course the admiral himself.

After a tetralogy of interesting ventures into the problem play, Soya returned to expressionism in a characteristically vital but somewhat unwieldy (and as yet unstaged) play called *A Corset for the Lion* (*Løve med korset*, 1950). Here, Soya leavens what is essentially a protracted philosophical debate with high theatricality at a pace described as *precipitando*. The play begins in an operating amphitheatre where the Angel of Peace is discovered in an ailing, recumbent condition. It quickly shifts to an editorial office where a professorial discourse on the causes of warfare is being considered for publication, and proceeds to a sequence of scenes dramatizing the treatise. The beginnings of the Trojan War and the imposition of Christianity on the Vikings are re-enacted, first according to the views of the Romanticist who presents, in Soya's words, the "aspect of a Saint-Bernard who has just saved a little Savoyard from freezing in the Alps," and then as the Materialist would have it. Neither argument appeals to the Psychologist, a caricature of Freud, and he summons up a sequence of scenes demonstrating the drives that lead

a man into warfare, quite apart from ideological and economic motives. After a savagely oversimplified portrait of the munitions makers and an amusing Wagnerian parody, Soya focuses upon the hollow comforts of an average family where domesticity is a façade for boredom and hatred, and argues the necessary sublimation of man's blood-thirsty and erotic instincts in sporting events, cinema, and theatre. It is hardly a dramatic conclusion, but the play makes good use of the devices of expressionistic spoofing that we in the United States have seen in such plays as *Beggar on Horseback*, *The Subway*, and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. And yet the recurrent, clinching images of corset and lion are pure Soya.

The limitations of the Soya-Abell school of playwriting were best stated by Abell himself in an essay published in *Perspektiv*, February 1955:

We build, shape images out of our knowledge, cut up our knowledge into bits and details and put them together into something new and living, as much so as anything else alive, even if it exists only in our fantasy. But before the concept "soul" we stand empty-handed. We have no materials to build with, whether it is a matter of the theatre's, our own soul, or that of the world itself.

Not so with Kaj Munk (1898-1944), but the Jutland pastor-playwright who died a brutal death at the hands of the Nazis is a case somewhat apart. His stature is very great in Denmark, even if we minimize the enhancing effect of his martyrdom. He was a taut, lonely, haunted figure suggesting in many ways a reincarnation of Kierkegaard. He frequently transcends a faltering dramaturgy and looms not only large but apart among the field of playwrights by virtue of a searching concern with man's soul and an intensity of spirit.

In a manifesto of 1929, Munk rejected the triviality and aestheticism of the theatre, mannered styles and hackneyed triangular situations. He called for a drama of will and passion, of red blood, of high moment and great style shaped by God's flaming contradictions. He demonstrated his return to the Shakespearean tradition in an adaptation of *Hamlet* (1934, prod. 1935), but even more in two chronicle plays of uneven structure but fine dramatic effect. *An Idealist* (1928-38), which preoccupied him for more than ten years, is a study of Herod's wily maintenance of power and defiance of God until his final capitulation in an encounter with Mary and the Christ child. In *Cant* (1931), based on the power politics and re-

ligious hypocrisy of Henry VIII, Munk obtained his first real success in the theatre. While still couched in an outmoded chronicle format, the play is distinguished by flexible blank verse, skillful dialogue, and a rich power of characterization.

The Word (*Ordet*, 1932), later converted into a prize-winning film by Carl Dreyer, is Munk's finest play and best indicates the triumph of content over form. Its portrait of peasant character and idiom is unsurpassed on the Danish stage; its study of contemporary religious belief, the power of "the Word," in an age of scepticism and apathy, is admirable. As a consequence, we overlook the structure which is as wooden as that of one of Vilhelm Moberg's peasant dramas. The focal action, however late in the play it comes, is the miraculous resurrection of Inger Borgen, brought about by her brother-in-law Johannes after her death in childbirth. The family doctor attributes the circumstance to the coroner's ineptitude. She wasn't dead at all. The family pastor relegates miracle to the mythic past and also searches for a realistic explanation. But it is clear that Munk wants us to believe that Johannes is not simply a paranoiac who has assumed the identity of Christ, but a man who has in some sense really walked with God. There is too much materialism, scepticism, and anemic Christianity in the world today. What is needed is the faith and strength that occasions a meeting with the Absolute. Even the warped idealism of a Herod or a Henry VIII is more compelling than that of the niggling little humanists. Man must live! And here we see an affinity between Kaj Munk and Pär Lagerkvist.

The contemporary Danish playwright who has most interestingly fused symbolism and realism is H. C. Branner (1903-), whose two best plays use the device of a central character who remains unseen throughout. In *The Riding Master* (*Ryttaren*, novel 1949; play, 1950) the title figure Hubert, though killed in a riding mishap, lives on as a kind of centaur, at one with his horse, symbolizing in the mind of his former lover Suzanne the animal strain in her that must be curbed, even if in the humane mediocrity of her husband. *The Siblings* (*Søskende*, 1952) is a study of the three grown children of a stern, authoritarian judge, who have gathered at his deathbed. The absence of the judge makes possible a calculated ambiguity. We never quite locate him between his real identity as a man of the provincial bench and his symbolic projection as God the Father. In any case, we are witness to the passing of authority. So, in a sense, Branner has written plays of the *id* and the *superego* where the Freudian components lie at the very heart of the play.

If, as Matthew Arnold insisted, the role of the critic is "to establish a current of fresh and true ideas," tribute should be paid to Danish literary criticism for its shaping influence on the whole of Scandinavian drama. It would be hard to find a playwright who remained impervious to the powerful mind of Georg Brandes. Many have felt, as Ibsen did, that Brandes "created a chasm between the past and the present." Nor should one minimize the significance of his brother Edvard as drama critic and man of the theatre. In general the Danish critic has been close enough to the theatre to encourage a mutual exchange of influence. The late Frederik Schyberg, known in America for a brilliant study of Whitman, grew up in the theatre and was thus prepared to continue and deepen the study of the actor's art monumentally begun by Karl Mantzius. He was also, as the Swedish poet Hjalmar Gullberg believes, not only the best of Scandinavian drama critics but probably the best drama critic of any place and any time. It is little wonder, then, that the Danish theatre itself displays an enlightened critical spirit.

III

The characteristic gesture of expressionism is the shriek, the Viennese critic Hermann Bahr once observed, with his eye upon a well-known painting by Edvard Munch. Certainly the undulant torment and psychopathic coloration of Munch's canvases are distinguishing landmarks of expressionism but, in spite of Munch's literary relations with playwrights, Strindberg among them, Norwegian drama displays no counterpart to him. There is no shriek, and not even the mordant innuendoes of satiric expressionism; there is instead the steady clarion voice of social protest raised again and again, by and large in a context of a reasonable rationalism.

Norwegians complain that their writers have slighted the stage lately, and, when they have written plays, they have too much adhered to the realistic Ibsen manner. It would seem so. Much as Swedish drama has been an extension of Strindberg's subliminal experimentation, Norwegian drama has been an extension of the realistic Ibsen. But there is a difference in the nature of the influence. It is not surprising that Strindberg established a tradition. He is the kind of provocative playwright, a playwright's playwright, who is most significant as trail-blazer and influence. Because his genius seldom fulfilled itself completely, the fulfillment was powerfully suggested to others. But in Ibsen, especially in the well-made plays,

the impact is frequently that of the closed syllogism. The sense of finality is admirable, but such that the Norwegian playwrights have perhaps been mesmerized into acceptance of the Ibsenesque format, be it that of *Hedda Gabler*, as is usually the case, or *When We Dead Awaken*. In matters of form, modern Norwegian drama is notably conservative.

On the other hand, the substance of its action has approached the revolutionary. This aspect of the Ibsen heritage may be described as a passion for social truth and amelioration, a curve which descends through the sophisticated liberalism of Gunnar Heiberg (1857-1929) and the intellectually leftist stance of Helge Krog (1889-) to the candid communism of Nordahl Grieg (1902-1943). Even before World War I the worker movement in Norway was of more radical character than in Sweden and Denmark. Class disparities were widened by the war, and the appearance of a syndicalist named Erling Falk in the early twenties did much to establish the major stream of Norwegian literature. Falk had behind him both Marxist training and an apprenticeship with the I. W. W. in the United States. He possessed a brilliantly rational mind and great personal appeal. Sigurd Hoel (1890-1960), Norway's most important contemporary novelist, joined Falk in editing the movement's organ *Toward Daylight* (*Mot dag*) for a time; and *Against the Wall* (*Mot muren*, 1930), one of Hoel's two not very successful plays, dramatizes the relationship between himself and Falk. Falk also appears in Helge Krog's *On the Way* (*Underveis*, 1931) in the guise of the socialist reformer Karsten Trane. In all fairness it should be said that Norway's literary Marxism was rather more an affair of raw-boned individualism than of collectivist, party spirit. Indeed as late as 1932 the Worker's Lexicon could describe Nordahl Grieg as "conservative and a member of Fedrelandslaget," a patriotic, anti-communistic organization. Hoel, Krog, and Grieg were simply looking for a new order of things in which social justice and national expansion could find a harmonious co-existence.

Fifty years ago, in 1911, Helge Krog made his debut with a brilliant piece of polemic journalism directed at Knut Hamsun. According to latest reports he is still active as a critic. Essentially Shavian in spirit, Krog is irascible in his insistence on the truth, but genially disarming in the recognition of merit. His first play, *The Great We* (*Det store vi*, 1919), was somewhat clogged with the materials of social protest, but it won him a theatre audience. *Jarlsbus* (1923) in turn almost lost that audience for him, dealing

as it did in a ponderous way with the irreconcilable difference between labor and management.

Krog will be chiefly remembered for three plays that may be viewed as a trilogy on the subject of woman's emergent role in society. Just why the assertion of individuality in Norwegian literature should be so often embodied in female eroticism I do not know. But the Noras and Rebecca Wests and Hilda Wangels of Ibsen find their successors in both Heiberg and Krog, with slight differences according to the context of the times. Sonja, the heroine of *The Conch* (*Konkylien*, 1929), makes her progress from man to man as the spirit moves her. It is not the tired, fin-de-siècle merry-go-round of Schnitzler's *Reigen*, however, but pursuit of the inner voice of her convoluted, sexual self symbolized in the title. Cecilia of *On the Way* is caught in a somewhat more somber problem. A 26-year-old communist doctor and social worker, she has to defend her right to bear and raise her child out of wedlock, quite deliberately in the teeth of conformist family opinion.

But by all odds the finest of Krog's plays is *Break-Up* (*Opbrudd*, 1936), the last of the trilogy, which probes every possible motivation, rationalization, and deceit in a triangle drama, to make of it, in the words of Hjalmar Söderberg, "a masterwork in the dialectic of love." Vibeke, an architect, has tired of the unbending personality of her lawyer husband Ketil and his callous philandering. She has turned to Kåre, a scholar and friend of the couple, but ultimately abandons both men because they are shut up forever in the cells of their egos. "Nothing is true!" she exclaims in disgust. "Everything is almost true!" And, coolly defiant toward such aimless relativism, she walks out to discover a new role in society. Idealized love has been rejected, as in Ibsen. A shattered bust of Dante makes the point symbolically effective. But erotic love has been rejected too, the "love for love's sake" of Heiberg. Vibeke is on the threshold of discovering her complete and undivided self.

Nordahl Grieg is by no means so accomplished a playwright as Krog, but it is illuminating to observe in some detail how he attempts to find new form for new ideas in a constant state of flux. His first play, *A Young Man's Love* (*En ung mands kjaerlighed*, 1927), is both romantic and conventional in its three-act structure and adherence to the unities, but it announces the themes that are to prevail in the later plays. Jan, the young protagonist, is caught between two loves, one for the luminous gentle Berit and another for the older, experienced woman Aimée. More fascinated than repelled by the

dark strain of eroticism which Aimée has, in some fashion, absorbed from her former husband Bernhard, who does not appear, Jan capitulates to her to provide compensation for the loss of her child, and Berit commits suicide. Thus the theme of defeat asserts itself and with it the dualism between the light and ascendant love and the dark abyss of passion and violence. Says Aimée: "All of us admire the mob; it is absurd not to be part of it, absurd to be good. All life is summed up in these two: Jesus and Barrabas. Which of the two? Release Barrabas! Barrabas is free, my Barrabas, your Barrabas; you think you have choked him out of your heart, but he continues to live, to flow like poison through your veins, and I am drinking him."

Thus the seeds of Grieg's second play, *Barrabas* (1927) are to be found in the first. Written on a boat in the Yangtse River, it is a product of Grieg's reportorial experience in China and quite a different interpretation of Biblical myth from Lagerkvist's novel and play of that name, though, as Jöran Mjöberg points out, there is a new expressionistic freedom of mise-en-scène that suggests early Lagerkvist. And yet it is too schematic in its dependence on an ideological skeleton, the struggle between social change through power politics and hate (Barrabas: Chiang Kai-chek) and social change through love (Jesus: Madame Sun Yat Sen and Borodin). Grieg's own position is somewhat equivocal; he can no more escape the fascination of force than he could the dashing personality of Chiang, but the play is dedicated to Borodin. In the total schematisation it is interesting to note that Pilate is, as Harald Engberg puts it, "the typical English colonial servant, a balance-of-power politician and humanist after the Chamberlain pattern."

A new restlessness and desperation is revealed in Grieg's third play, and with it an intensified social consciousness. *The Atlantic* (*Atlanterhavet*, 1932) is an attack on sensation-mongering and the machine cult, embodied in a large newspaper enterprise. The newspaper, on the verge of bankruptcy, sponsors a flight over the Atlantic, which is opposed by an idealistic reporter named Ketil, an extension of Grieg himself who knew the newspaper business very well indeed through his relations with *Tidens Tegn* and *Oslo Aftenavis*. As a result of disappointment in love, Ketil abandons his ideals and accompanies the flight, which is doomed by a premature departure forced on the crew by the profiteering bosses. Because of the irrelevancy of the love interest and the dated situation, Grieg came to regret the play.

Two motives dictated Grieg's next play, *Our Honor and Our*

Glory (*Vår ære og vår makt*, 1935): a desire to channel his new communistic zeal into an attack on capitalistic war profiteering and a feeling that he should rehabilitate the ordinary seaman ever since his first novel had been taken as an insult rather than an attempt to reform working conditions. The play is a broad satiric attack on Norwegian shipping merchants of World War I, in oversimplified characters like the hypocrite Detlef and the coldly cynical Freddy — flat, implausible characters, but credible enough so that Norwegian theatre producers were somewhat reticent about staging the play. They are not very successful characters because Grieg did not know this level of society. His masterpiece is the ordinary seaman "Vingrisen," the raw, earthy, courageous spirit of the people, immediately plausible and quite wonderful. The broad contrasts of the play can best be understood in cinematic terms. On his Moscow visit of 1932-34 he had been much impressed by the films of Eisenstein and the staging of Meyerhold, "whose form of expression had all the intensity of a tiger's spring." Pace and ironic contrast are two desiderata in producing this cinematic play.

At the brink of success in the merger of form and content, Grieg wrote *But Tomorrow*— (*Men i morgen*—, 1936), his last play and his weakest, weak because he subsided into the well-made format and because ideology reduced his characters to walking automatons. His focus is upon a fertilizer factory which converts to the manufacture of poison gas; his concern is with the proletariat who will — tomorrow — create a free, peace-abiding society. The various nationalities are mechanically satirized in Sir Henry Lewis, English gentleman; De Montclair, Frenchman; Dr. Mühlenberg, the Nazi; and David Børs (bourse), the international capitalist. Every character is fixed in the social *schema*; Mrs. Sten, wife of the factory manager, Bertram Sten, represents religiosity developing into fascism; her daughter Matti, born blind, like Teiresias has the only real vision into the future; Paul Berner is the disillusioned writer who worships the power complex.

Thus Norway's dramatic impulse languished, nor has it found itself since the years of the Nazi occupation. But the theatre has flourished in Norway and we may be thankful for that.

IV

Considering the rich bulk of early literature in Iceland, the Eddic and skaldic poetry, it is at first startling to discover how late drama

made its appearance. Except for occasional school comedies like *Sperðill* (German *Hanswurst*, c. 1730), by Snorri Björnsson (1710-1803), there is little in the 18th century; and 19th century romanticism produced nothing of consequence until *New Year's Eve* (*Nýjársmóttin*, 1871), by the economic expert Indriði Einarsson (1851-1939), which was appropriately revived to inaugurate the National Icelandic Theatre in Reykjavik in 1950.

The absence of urban centers in Iceland is chiefly accountable for the late formation of Icelandic drama. This and the comparatively late independence of Iceland as a nation are the two factors chiefly responsible for the dominance of the national ideal. In spite of the introduction of Reinhardt theatricality and the flexibility of expressionistic stage practice in the mid-twenties, in spite of the rapport between Copenhagen and Reykjavik literary life, intensified by the fact that two Icelanders, Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889-) and Guðmundur Kamban (1888-1945), made Copenhagen their home and wrote their plays in both languages, modern Icelandic drama has not espoused foreign themes and methods. Instead it has cultivated its history and its folklore. These are the two prevailing strains, and they create a conservative kind of theatre.

Bishop Jón Arason, by Tryggvi Sveinbjörnsson (1891-), is significant not merely because it won the Royal Theatre's playwriting contest of 1950, but because it is the latest and best of a series of dramatizations of the life of this 16th century Icelandic patriot. It is a straight-forward chronicle play built on the skeleton of militant conflict, the church vs. the state, or, more correctly, home rule vs. the autocratic rule of the remote foreign power, Denmark. Bishop Jón Arason, Iceland's last Catholic bishop and the pillar of home rule, is a fascinating portrait of a man. He has the nobility of the tragic hero and goes to his death proudly with his two stalwart sons, one a layman and the other a priest. Perhaps his occasional violence and his non-celibacy palliate his Catholicism in what is now a Protestant stronghold. In any case, Icelanders still pay tribute to this passionate man.

Halldór Kiljan Laxness (1902-), 1955 Nobel Prize winner, has made his contribution to historical drama, though chiefly by way of adaptations like *The Bell of Iceland* (*Íslands-klukkan*, novel, 1943; play, 1950). Laxness converts the 17th century farmer Jón Hreggviðsson, condemned to death for murdering the Danish king's hangman, into a symbol of Iceland's indomitable spirit. Like *Bishop Jón Arason* a chronicle play, it has exerted an immense appeal to

Icelandic audiences. In a similar historical vein, but in verse, Sigurður Einarsson (1898-), pastor, poet, and essayist, has dealt with Iceland's complete subjection to the Danish monarch in the oath-taking ceremony of Kópavogur on 28 July 1662. The play is *By the Power of the King* (*Fyrir kóngsins mekt*, 1954).

Folklore made its effective entrance into modern Icelandic drama in two plays by Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880-1919), one-time student of veterinary science and a dweller in Copenhagen's Bohemia. In *Eyvind of the Hills* (*Fjalla-Eyvindur*, 1911) he combines "the hunger of his bohemian existence with romantic folk tale, folkways, and native motifs from Iceland, testing the tempestuous love of a spirited woman against hunger in the Icelandic winter mountains" (Stefán Einarsson). *The Wish* (*Galdra-Loftur*, 1915) gives to an 18th century version of the Faust story a Nietzschean reading that to some extent reflects the influence of Georg Brandes.

David Stefánsson (1895-) came to both the historical and folk modes naturally. His father was a member of the Althing and his uncle a distinguished folklorist. *The Monks at Möðruvellir* (*Munkarnir á Möðruvöllum*, 1924) deals with the novitiate Ottár who is caught between the Prior, who represents hypocrisy and corruption, and the young girl Sigrún, who stands for purity, honesty, and joy. Pagan freedom triumphs over repressive spiritual authority and the Prior dies in a fire that destroys the monastery. The scene of *The Forgotten Country* (*Landið gleymda*, 1953) is laid in 18th century Greenland and this time the conflict is between Hans Egede, a Norwegian minister bent on converting the natives, and an autocratic Danish governor equally intent on exploiting them for the crown. A pestilence drives the Danish administration out of the country and wipes out much of the population, including Egede's wife. Doing a heroic missionary work, Egede learns humility and achieves a union with the unspoiled simplicity of the native Greenlanders.

But David's best play, and the best play of the 40's in Iceland, was the folk fantasy *The Golden Gate* (*Gullna Hliðið*, 1941) which deals with the translation into heaven of the wayward peasant soul of one Jón Jonsson who has jeopardized his chances by a weakness for brandy, women, and his neighbor's sheep. His faithful wife grabs his soul as he breathes his last, thrusts it in a bag fastened by one of her own garters, and, after lengthy ascent and many encounters, artfully tosses it into heaven's gate where it manages to find welcome. The conversation with St. Peter is marvellously funny.

"Talk like a Christian, Jón dear," his wife admonishes; to which Jón replies: "I'll talk just as I please — like every other Icelander." To this mixture of satire and national pride, Davið brings a playful expressionism of staging and the use of hymns which lends a poignant spirituality to the comedy.

On the Icelandic horizon are signs of a greater diversity. The philologist and diplomat Sigurður Nordal (1886-) in 1946 wrote a Pirandellian play of revolt against bourgeois provinciality called *Resurrection* (*Uppstigning*); Halldór Laxness in 1954 supplied the stage with *The Silver Moon* (*Silfurtunglið*), a play protesting American air bases in Iceland; Agnar Þórðarson's recent *Atoms and Madams* (*Kjarnorka og kvenhylli*) brings together the farcical combination of an American swindler prospecting for uranium, a member of the Icelandic Althing, and a very funny rustic. Though the social satire may not be of the highest order, there is abundant evidence that the Icelandic playwright of today is exploring new ideas and new techniques in the theatre. The energy, resourcefulness, and imagination are there.

New Dimensions in German Comedy

by FRANK D. HIRSCHBACH

In his essay *The Irony of Things* (Die Ironie der Dinge, 1921) Hugo von Hofmannsthal writes: "Long before the war I found the following quotation in the *Fragments* of Novalis: 'After an unfortunate war comedies must be written.' This remark in its strangely laconic form seemed rather odd to me. Today I understand it better. Irony is the element of comedy, and a war with an unhappy ending is the very best means of bringing out the irony which prevails over everything in the world."¹

A search for the above-mentioned quotation in the works of Novalis revealed that the aphoristic and paradoxical formulation is Hofmannsthal's rather than that of Novalis. In his *New Collections of Fragments* Novalis writes under the title "Poeticisms": "Every representation of the past is a tragedy in the real sense; every representation of coming events, of the future is a comedy. Tragedy is in its proper place at those points in history when a nation shows its strength, comedy when a nation is weak. Tragedies would be appropriate in England and France at the present, in Germany comedies would be the thing."²

A brief survey of German comedies results in an admittedly tenuous connection between their dates of conception and the end of unhappy wars. Perhaps the best example would be Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*, which Goethe called "a product of the Seven-Year's War" and through which Lessing hoped to contribute to the healing of wounds which this tragic German civil war had caused.

Our own century has lived in the shadow of war almost since its beginning, and if we assume the validity of the Novalis-Hofmannsthal dictum from which we departed, it is not surprising that German comedy has revived mightily during the past fifty years. Its originality and vitality tend to extinguish forever the shopworn statement that there is no such thing as a German comedy. One needs to mention only the names of Schnitzler, Wedekind, Hauptmann, Kaiser, Sternheim, Toller, Brecht, Zuckmayer, Frisch and Dürrenmatt as examples of playwrights who have written comedies in our century.

In this essay I intend to discuss a number of recent German comedies which are connected — either closely or more remotely — with the trends and events of our times and which reflect unhappy times and wars. It is my goal to point out how the concept and technique of comedy have changed during the past fifty years, how writers of comedy feel about their profession, and how for some of them comedy has supplanted tragedy as the expression of a tragic concept of life.

It is well-known that Hofmannsthal was long judged on the basis of his early works as a precocious and "over-ripe" aesthete, a poet who was "melancholy, overly saturated with culture, fatigued, yearning in a complex manner, self-doubting, at the same time youthful and senile," to mention only a few of the descriptions which were bestowed upon him. Needless to say, his supposed decadence won him the applause of an enthusiastic audience of primarily young readers. His Prologue to Schnitzler's *Anatol*, his poem "On Transitoriness" (Terzinen über die Vergänglichkeit), and the "Ballad of External Life" (Ballade des Äusseren Lebens) were often considered the final result and perfect description of his works. After the turn of the century, however, Hofmannsthal turned from lyric poetry and the lyric drama and underwent an "antique phase" which is marked primarily by a new version of Sophocles' *Electra*. These are also the years of collaboration with Richard Strauss, a unique partnership in German stage history which produced *Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Arabella*, and other operas. Although the generation whose *Weltschmerz* Loris had expressed in brilliant verse was disenchanted when he became a "librettist" and supposedly deserted the pedestal of the great poet, he himself did not at all consider his turn to comedy an escape from responsibility. On the contrary, he looked upon the writing of comedies as a cultural task which he intended to solve after the war and did — much like Thomas Mann — through essays, lectures, and his *German Reader* (Deutsches Lesebuch). The heir of Grillparzer, Nestroy, and Raimund envisioned an amalgamation of high class and popular theatre, and he tried to fulfill his assignment in religious dramas, operas, and non-musical comedies.

The Difficult Man (Der Schwierige) was written during the First World War and published in 1918. Hofmannsthal's letters to Carl Burckhardt attest to the consternation with which he views the collapse of the Austrian monarchy. "For six years I have been lying here like a dog on his leash," he writes his friend in 1920, "at first

in horrible fear (not for myself), then in a dull stupor, powerless convulsions, fear and trembling, despair, resignation, horror, disgust and nausea — in a gradually collapsing and decaying world."³ In his play Hofmannsthal builds a final monument for this world of small intrigue, of budding and disintegrating love affairs, a world in which the salon is the battlefield of witty and skillful conversational partners who cross their blades deftly and inflict sharp but rarely mortal wounds upon each other, a world in which people still address each other in the third person singular, drive coaches and shout most undemocratically for secretary or servant. It is hardly necessary to mention that Hofmannsthal attends the funeral of this epoch with regret but hardly with sadness, and the irony of the poet who uses his building blocks one last time to construct this world though he knows he is too old for it, is unmistakable.

The invisible social criticism — mild, amiable, and tinged with sadness — is undoubtedly an important comic element of this play. But social criticism in comedies is nothing new, even though German writers generally prefer the novel for this purpose. In reading *Der Schwierige* one is surprised again and again how Hofmannsthal makes use of numerous conventional comic elements and situations. To cite an example: at the beginning of Act I a loving and ambitious mother hatches a plot to marry off her son advantageously. To this purpose, Crescence, Stani's mother and the sister of the "difficult" Count Hans-Karl (Kari) von Bühl, must at first upset the relationship between Helene and Neuhoff, and she asks her brother to help her with this project. Her brother promises to represent his nephew, goes to work with great seriousness and much good will, and in the end (without any design of his own) becomes engaged to Helene himself. We find the typical comic pattern here: the past is exposed and the knot tied in the first act, further and unintentional complications arise in the second, a catastrophe is averted and the knot unravelled in the third act. The theme of the bachelor who is trying to escape two marriage-bound women and is finally caught by one, is a typical comedy situation. There are others which have counterparts in the comic literature of all nations. One might mention the girl who sets her traps for a man and receives varied and by no means unselfish advice from her girl friends. There is the visitor who continually has to be concealed in an adjacent room and hears uncomplimentary things from other interrupting visitors. Or the delightful situation in which the semi-educated Edine congratulates the conceited scholar upon a book which a hated colleague with a similar-sounding name

has written.

With the exception of the hero and the heroine almost all persons are caricatures. We have already mentioned the wire-pulling mother, the fatuous woman who has read and misunderstood numerous books, and the conceited famous man. They are joined by the good-looking young man who believes himself irresistible; the scheming North German who believes that one should take the whip along when one goes to women; the deceived husband who trusts his successful competitors; the dishonest servant who speaks of his master and himself as "we"; and others.

Even in the case of the non-heroic hero Hofmannsthal occasionally borders on the comic, somewhat in the manner in which Dostoyevski's Prince Myshkin appears comic to us at times. Hans-Karl von Bühl is a pedant with exceedingly sensitive nerves who is irritated by a crooked picture on the wall, who has occupied a seat in the Upper House for a year and a half without ever uttering a word, and who has such a disdain for human contacts that his servant has orders to announce Kari's sister and nephew before they can come into his chambers, even though they live under the same roof. Yet, though Hofmannsthal makes Hans-Karl appear comic in regard to external matters, we are perilously close to the abyss of tragedy where his inner qualities are concerned, and here we encounter the basically new element in this comedy.

Kari Bühl is the characteristic non-hero of twentieth-century literature who reminds us of a dozen figures in modern German letters. The outstanding characteristic of this "man without qualities" is his absolute lack of the capacity or the will to commit himself in any manner whatever, whether it concerns an appointment for the evening, a firm opinion, or a human relationship. Only with great difficulty and after numerous arguments pro and con is he able to decide that he will attend a *soirée* tonight. "I dread *soirées* . . . the whole thing is such an inextricable bundle of misunderstandings. Ah, these chronic misunderstandings!" he confesses to his sister who calls his indecision "fiddle-faddle."⁴ In human relationships he can appreciate momentary actions, "only wishing to hold on to someone is not permitted. Only occupying something that can't be held."⁵ Thus, he defines marriage as an institution which men have invented to "change coincidence and impurity into something permanent and valid."⁶ Since every man and every problem have as many facets as observers, and since everyone speaks a different language, he considers it a completely hopeless attempt to communicate in words.

He speaks exceedingly little himself, for "speaking is based on an indecent superiority complex,"⁷ and "it is impossible to open one's mouth without causing the most irremediable confusion."⁸

Kari's speechlessness and indecision are external indications of an inner instability which show his relatedness to the heroes of certain expressionist dramas, novellas of Thomas Mann or novels of Kafka who are similarly at odds with themselves and paralyzed by introspection. But the hero of the expressionist drama undergoes a painful and often tragic metamorphosis; Mann's protagonists either die or renounce the active life; Kafka's heroes confess a guilt whose exact dimensions remain shrouded in a fog. Hofmannsthal, on the other hand, solves the problem of "the difficult man" in a comic manner through a woman, related and yet totally undifficult, who leads the reluctant one to an engagement which he finally espouses joyfully. The situation is not unlike that of Lessing's Tellheim and Minna, except that we are here dealing with an out-and-out intellectual and psychological problem which is solved by a woman of energy and understanding. Within the framework of a comedy of manners and with completely conventional means Hofmannsthal here writes a drama of salvation and hope for the most-described human type of the century who is almost always treated hopelessly. This is a spiritual, "inner" comedy, and here, I believe, Hofmannsthal has made his contribution to the comedy of his time.

Although Sternheim's *Citizen Schippel* (Bürger Schippel) appeared in 1913, its date of publication is hardly an argument against the initially quoted words of Novalis. Almost all of his comedies were written before or during World War I, and the author considered them "out of season" and wrote them for a future which he did not consider distant. Thus, the first edition of *Tabula Rasa* bears the following notation: "I forbid the performance of this play for the duration of the war." Only after the war did he combine eleven comedies and dramas, written between 1908 and 1922, under the title *Lives of Bourgeois Heroes* (Aus dem bürgerlichen Heldenleben) which he describes as "part of a poetic and political work . . . which represents acid and permanent criticism of the conditions which led to war."⁹ Although *Der Schwierige* and *Bürger Schippel* both take place in the present, the latter play is nevertheless much closer to the events of the time, and purports to be, as the above quotation indicates, a satire on the day and the attitudes of its citizens. The male quartet of a small, provincial German town which has won first prize on two previous occasions has lost its first tenor through death shortly

before the annual singing competition is to take place. The only one who could possibly replace, indeed improve upon, the late fellow singer is a proletarian who, in addition, is in doubt about who his father was. Compelled by circumstances, the three bourgeois pillars of society turn to the worker who not only demands full social equality but also wishes to marry Thekla, the sister of one of the three. Schippel's bid is haughtily refused until it becomes known that Thekla has had a short affair with the young and highly romantic ruler of the principality. The sister, slightly reduced in value, is now promised to Schippel who refuses to accept the gift but is willing to loan his voice to the quartet. The foursome wins the prize again, another one of the singers is willing to marry Thekla, and after Schippel has emerged a trembling victor in a duel which was forced upon him, he is solemnly declared a fellow citizen, much to his satisfaction.

Sternheim felt that it was his vocation to be "a physician to the body of his time" and has this to say about the profession of a poet-physician: "In order to attain his high purpose he employs, like the medical doctor, the allopathic or homeopathic method. He can place his finger upon the diseased part of humanity and make his conscious hero assume a fighting stance which shows a readiness to sacrifice his life (characteristic of tragedy) or he can endow the hero with a moribund quality and make him be fanatically obsessed by it (characteristic of comedy). In a tragedy the world around the hero ignores or fails to recognize evil and furnishes a tragic effect; in comedy it is the hero himself who appears tragic for the same reason. In either case, the effect upon the spectator is the same — peering down into the abyss he sees a desperate struggle between the divine and Man, closing his eyes to knowledge, and he is left distressed and edified."¹⁰ Thus, Sternheim intended to write a didactic and edifying comedy with the aid of ribaldry, satire, irony, and more than usually profound thought.

In Sternheim, too, we encounter many tried and tested tricks which add nothing new to the technique of comedy. Thus, the duel between two cowards is a well-known means of producing laughter, as is the situation of the girl who is pursued by a number of suitors and never knows from whom certain indications of love stem. Basically new, however, is the language of this comedy, a means of expression which Sternheim created for his purposes and employs in his plays, his prose, and elsewhere. Extreme economy of expression is the salient feature of this language. When Thekla fails to mani-

fest sufficient sadness on the day of her fiancé's funeral and is admonished, she replies: "An evening in June decided. We two alone. I — filled with happiness, surrendering to him as universe. He was bound to speak, give signs, I would have overwhelmed him. His silence exuded idiocy. Eyes of a calf on spindly legs."¹¹ Or: "The ghost at night, stature, figure, was similar to Wolke."¹² Herr Hicketier, profoundly disturbed because he, a member of an old family, should approach the upstart Schippel, exclaims: "A Hicketier, however, who — goldsmiths — have been inhabiting this country since the Thirty Years War."¹³ When it is suggested to him that the coveted prize may elude them, he groans: "Give up as a man what moved us as boys!"¹⁴ When Schippel produces a magnificent resounding note, the other three gentlemen, Krey, Hicketier and Wolke, comment: "Aha"; "That sound speaks volumes"; "Bravo."¹⁵ When Wolke inquires whether there is no way out of their quandary, Krey answers: "We ascertained: none. Hardly two weeks until the festival, and no tenor available except for him."¹⁶ The following is one of many sentences where the verb is lacking. Thekla: "Why away in the middle of the night like a thief?"¹⁷ Or: "I — free again."¹⁸ Or: "The funeral — magnificent."¹⁹

Other characteristics of Sternheim's linguistic technique and some examples, many of which could be augmented at will, are the following:

- a. use of the present tense where German would ordinarily employ the past. "At midnight I hear from the fence, see a shadow."²⁰
- b. use of the imperfect where Germans would usually employ the present perfect in conversation. "A girl spat into my face."²¹
- c. beginning a sentence with a relative pronoun. In answer to the question: who was it? "Whoever admires you presently."²²
- d. distributing sentence elements to several speakers. Hicketier: "This lightning from a blue sky." Wolke: "Has shaken her to the roots."²³
- e. omitting the personal pronoun. "Play the clarinet. Sleep in an attic."²⁴
- f. beginning a sentence with the verb. "Comes your letter."²⁵
- g. use of a single word to sum up a dependent clause. "Poverty-stricken you see in us your employers . . ."²⁶
- h. unusual word order.
- i. use of ordinarily intransitive verbs in a transitive manner.
- j. non-separation of separable verbs.
- k. use of conditional clauses without "if."
- l. military style of speaking.
- m. bureaucratic language.
- n. use of clichés or pseudo-educated language.

Sternheim's language has usually been considered a parody on the idiom which was supposedly spoken (or perhaps better, written) in the offices and barracks of Wilhelminian Germany. Anyone who looks at pre-war issues of the German humor magazine "Simplicissimus" will find this language lampooned there. Diebold speaks of "officialese of emptiness" in Sternheim's plays which is, according to him, no longer a characteristic caricature but "the linguistic symbol of dehumanization, grammar which is forced upon a character for the purpose of total unmasking Even the language turns out to be a skeleton."²⁷ Julius Bab calls the "unsentimentally snarling language of this bourgeois-killer . . . a cross between smart-alecky Junker language and informal stock exchange jargon, i.e. the typical language of the New German upper middle class . . . Still, one must admit that it is an artistic technique."²⁸

But in connection with the language of this play another element of significance must be considered here. In the novel and the poem an author can express his own opinion or mood without difficulty. The characteristically German creation of the *Bildungsroman* is especially suited to this purpose, and even where the novel is not written in the first person singular, authors from Goethe to Thomas Mann have never considered it a stylistic break to speak *pro domo*, let us say, by interspersing a sentence, beginning with the words: "Here we see our hero" Everyone knows that the lyric poem is a strongly subjective art form and often derives its effect from the fact that it is written by someone who identifies himself as "I". The drama deprives the author of a similar opportunity. To be sure, many a play contains a "message", and in many dramas it is not difficult to identify the hero or one of the other characters as the author's mouthpiece. Yet, such an attempt at identification is at best the result of interpretation possibly varying from observer to observer and from age to age so that the author might well fear that the import of his message could be lost. By making his characters speak a non-naturalistic language which bears little or no resemblance to their social or educational status, Sternheim has created a gulf of irony, parody, or cynicism between poet and character which is conspicuous to the observer and to a large degree prevents his identification with the actors on stage. Thus, Sternheim has produced here the kind of "alienation effect" which Brecht employs to a larger extent and with additional means.

Among the writers in the German language who have attained their reputation since the end of the Second World War, there are

only two dramatists of rank. Both make use of the genre of comedy and both are Swiss, which might induce the critic to ask the not-completely-facetious question whether it is perhaps necessary to be Swiss to write comedies nowadays. Friedrich Dürrenmatt is by far more original than Max Frisch. He has more ideas, he uses the stage more skillfully and with more experience; he is also more successful. Although the attempt has been made to show his indebtedness to a dozen other writers, this has turned out to be a totally inconclusive effort. The writer in our time is without exception an intelligent person, open to all influences and in touch with all the intellectual currents of his time through reading, traveling, visits to the theatre, attendance at cultural congresses, and the like. Discussion of the dependence of one writer upon others — always a questionable and not always a useful occupation for literary scholars — has largely lost its significance in our century. The names of a number of authors can be mentioned whose intellectual, spiritual, and technical influence Dürrenmatt admits: Nestroy, Wilder, Pirandello, Wedekind, Sternheim, Brecht, Shaw, and also Max Frisch.

Dürrenmatt, too, is one of those who consciously write comedies after wars. Almost every one of his ten to twelve dramas and radio plays is a comedy of sorts, and in a lecture, published under the title *Problems of the Theatre*, the author has explained why he considers comedy the only possible dramatic form today. In the center of classical tragedy stands the tragic hero whose guilt and innocence, virtue and crime are distributed in such a way that he arouses our pity. Bourgeois tragedy, introduced in Germany by Lessing and Schiller, answers the public's desire to see itself on the stage in the person of the suffering hero. According to Dürrenmatt tragic heroes can no longer exist in our world today because tragedies "are produced by butchers and carried out by giant machines. Hitler and Stalin cannot be converted into a Wallenstein. Their power is so vast they themselves are only coincidental and external manifestations of this power, replacable at will, and the catastrophe has become too ramified, too complicated, too mechanical, and often it is also bare of all meaning. The power of Wallenstein is still a visible power, but today power can be seen only to a very small degree. As in an iceberg, the greater part is concealed by a faceless, abstract element."²⁹ "Art only penetrates to the victims if it reaches any humans at all; it does not touch the mighty."³⁰ Now, one could perhaps imagine a tragedy which would accuse or bewail all of humanity, somewhat in the form in which expressionism had done just that,

but Dürrenmatt cannot visualize such a tragedy either. "In the muddle of our century, in this bankruptcy of the white race, there exist neither guilty nor responsible men. It is nobody's fault and no one wanted it . . . We are too collectively guilty, too collectively embedded in the sins of our fathers and ancestors. We are only their heirs. That is our tough luck, not our guilt."³¹

Tragedy presupposes a finished universe, and the nucleus of a tragedy often consists of a man who rebels against the rules of this finished world. Since, on the other hand, our world is disintegrating or changing in a revolutionary manner, Dürrenmatt believes that it can be described only through comedy, for only comedy can "form the formless, bring order into chaos."³² There is, of course, nothing basically new about comedies which use their own times as a target. In *The Captain of Köpenick* (*Der Hauptmann von Köpenick*) Zuckmayer made fun of certain tendencies in Wilhelminian Germany. In *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* (*Jacobowsky und der Oberst*) Werfel wrote the tragi-comedy of the modern Wandering Jew. But Dürrenmatt strives for a greater distance between event and art, and he creates this distance through the idea. By means of the idea he transforms the world of representation into a symbolic world in which it is both easier and more tactful to parody the real world. Dürrenmatt's comedies teem with ideas of all sorts and descriptions. The overabundance of ideas occasionally evokes an anarchic impression and lays the author open to the often-heard accusation that he is more a writer of cabaret scripts than a poet.

The Marriage of Milord Mississippi (*Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi*) is by no means Dürrenmatt's best play but it is the most turbulent, the richest in ideas, and the one in which he employs almost every one of his techniques. It lends itself best, therefore, to a description of his manner of writing. The play begins with exceedingly detailed stage directions, describing the room in which the entire action takes place and beginning with the words: "The room stinks to high heaven."³³ The mixture of styles which characterizes furniture and pictures is complemented by the confusion which the view produces: from one window we see a Northern town with a Gothic cathedral whereas the other window presents a cypress, remnants of an antique temple, a bay and a harbor. Already the author occasionally intrudes with remarks, such as: "The door in the rear leads through the veranda into a further room; this door is unimportant, actually I need it only in the fifth act."³⁴ At the beginning of the play three gentlemen appear, dressed in raincoats, and order a fourth

to stand up against a wall, whereupon they shoot him. The latter then turns to the audience and informs it that they have just seen the end of the play which for "therapeutic" reasons was advanced to the beginning. The play, he continues, deals with three men — as he speaks, their pictures descend from above — "who were determined to do nothing more and nothing less than to partly change and partly save the world by various methods and who had the cruel luck to encounter a woman who could be neither changed nor saved because she loved nothing but the moment."³⁵ At the mention of the woman, Anastasia's picture descends. The story, he continues, could begin somewhere else, for instance at the moment when he, the Communist agitator Saint-Claude, was hatching a revolutionary plot in Rumania, or at the time when the inebriated Count Übelohe attempted to perform an appendectomy on a drunk Malayan in a miserable village in the interior of Borneo. Two pictures, describing these scenes, appear from above. Finally, Saint-Claude asks his audience to imagine a date five years earlier and disappears.

Next, the prosecuting attorney, Florestan Mississippi appears. A fanatic of justice, proud of the ever-growing number of his death sentences, his great aim in life is the re-establishment of Mosaic Law. In the following scene he is having coffee with Anastasia, who has recently killed her husband, a sugar manufacturer, because he had been unfaithful to her with Mississippi's wife. Shortly thereafter Mississippi poisoned his wife. In both cases the poison was supplied by Count Übelohe, a former lover of Anastasia who fled shortly after the murders. Mississippi, the man of inexorable retribution, has sentenced Anastasia and himself to marriage. Anastasia is willing, and Mississippi turns to the audience to comment: "This, ladies and gentlemen, let us confess was the dramatic beginning of a marriage five years ago which turned out to be a living hell . . . but which definitely purified my wife and me."³⁶ We learn that he succeeded in increasing his death sentences from two hundred to three hundred and fifty during the next few years, that Anastasia paid regular visits to the inhabitants of "death row" and was therefore generally called the "Angel of Prisons", and that he is just about to hold a conference with the Minister of Justice, Diego. The minister announces that the government has decided to sacrifice Mississippi, the most-hated man in the land, to the demands of the opposition. The next one to appear is the Communist agitator Saint-Claude, who offers Mississippi a high position in the Party and threatens to reveal his past if he does not accept it. Mississippi, who has claimed to be the

offspring of an American industrial tycoon and an Italian princess, has in reality risen from the gutter. He was the doorman of a bordello which was operated by Saint-Claude. In a wet corner of the cellar he found a copy of the Bible from which he derived his vision of the Law while Saint-Claude found a copy of *Das Kapital* in the pocket of a murdered procurer and learned the art of world revolution from it. Mississippi declines to join the Communist Party in spite of all threats, Saint-Claude disappears, and the lights go on, but Count Übelohe steps before the curtain and begs the audience not to go away for the intermission yet because his stage appearance is yet to come. He describes his scene to the audience as comparable to his whole life: ridiculous, untimely and grotesque, and asks: "At this critical juncture of the action into which you, ladies and gentlemen, as the audience and we on the stage have been lured by a malicious author, the question must be asked *how* the author feels about all this, whether he permits himself to be driven from idea to idea without a plan or whether he is guided by a secret design."³⁷ And he comes to the conclusion that it was the author's intent to investigate what happens if, when certain ideas collide with people, the latter take the ideas seriously and try to convert them into reality. Is the spirit capable of changing a world which only exists without an Idea? Is the world as pure matter capable of improvement?

From here on the action becomes more complex and confusing. Count von Übelohe returns after five years in the tropics and finds Anastasia in the arms of the minister of justice. The minister is followed by three grotesque priests — a Protestant, a Catholic, and a Jew — who thank Anastasia in the manner of a Greek chorus for her services to the prisoners. Anastasia claims that she still loves Übelohe, and he decides to reveal the entire truth to her husband. But the greater part of the conversation between Mississippi and Übelohe has to take place on the floor where both seek shelter from the revolutionary bullets in the street outside. The revolution is quelled, and the government sends Mississippi to an insane asylum. Anastasia tries to start an affair with the Prime Minister, but a descending picture informs us of his gala wedding to another woman. Saint-Claude, who has lost favor in the Party, intends to found a new bordello and tries to induce Anastasia to become his first lady. Hardly has he turned his back when Anastasia drops a poisoned lump of sugar into his coffee which, however, he fails to drink. Dressed in the robes of a prosecuting attorney Mississippi appears once more and interrogates his wife, who insists that she has loved only him;

this is a great satisfaction for the jurist, who now sees his life and career justified. From all doors and windows, even from the clock, emerge physicians in white smocks and with thick horn-rimmed glasses: Mississippi is such an eminently interesting case that his doctor has brought the entire convention of psychiatrists with him on his search for his patient. Übelohe bids Anastasia farewell to wander restlessly across the face of the earth, sharing it with every beggar. "Thus I am cast upon an earth which can no longer be saved. Nailed to the cross of my ridiculousness, I hang from this beam which mocks me; without protection I am lifted toward the face of God: a last Christian."³⁸ A tableau with a painted airplane indicates his departure. After a grotesque double murder in which Mississippi and his wife poison each other, the three henchmen appear and repeat the scene of Saint-Claude's execution which we already know from the beginning. But even here the comedy does not end, for all the dead appear once more to explain and justify their existences. Übelohe has the last word: with a battered tin helmet on his head and a crooked spear in his right hand he attacks again and again a circling windmill, "an eternal comedy so that His glory may shine, made brighter by our weakness."³⁹

In the above-mentioned *Problems of the Theatre* Dürrenmatt writes that a sort of abandon (*Übermut*) is part of the theatre and continues: "It is my passion — not always felicitous — to wish to represent the wealth and variety of the world on the stage. Thus, my plays often become ambiguous and seem to confuse. Misunderstandings arise because people search desperately in the chicken coop of my plays for the egg of interpretation which I adamantly refuse to lay."⁴⁰ The "abandon" manifests itself in a cascade of ideas, some frivolous and some profound, each one, however, a contribution to the total situation or the basic idea. If we examine the technique and means of Dürrenmatt's comedy, we find them divided into four categories: confusion or relativity of time and place, comedy of language, comedy of situation, and thematic comedy.

In Dürrenmatt's plays time can be abbreviated, slowed, increased, halted, and repeated. The jumps in the treatment of time often make considerable demands upon the audience. In *It Is Written* (*Es steht geschrieben*) the prophet of the anabaptists Johann Bockelson appears on stage and introduces himself to two streetcleaners by telling them his autobiography, which concludes with his death on January 22, 1536. The street cleaners are justifiably surprised, for the present date is only September 23, 1533. We are dealing here with the same

type of anticipation of a known future which we already discussed in *The Marriage*. On the other hand, Dürrenmatt likes to give the impression of exactness and realism by tying his plays to a definite period, even to a certain day. *Romulus the Great* takes place on the day of the Ides of March 476 and ends on the next morning. In *The Marriage* the names of Trygve Lie and Soviet Foreign Minister Vishinsky are mentioned. In *The Visit* time designations and the ages of all characters are noted with great exactness.

The intentional anachronism or an exaggerated sense of historical consciousness belong in this category. *An Angel Comes to Babylon* takes place in the days of the Old Testament but the stage directions for the first act already call for posters which read "Begging is unsocial." King Nebuchadnezzar, who wishes to stamp out begging, admits that beggars are picturesque in terms of the tourist trade but that the practice is not in step with the arrival of a new age. An angel apologizes for his ignorance in the field of anthropology by stressing that he, after all, is a physicist. Trolleys clang through the city, free enterprise and the stock exchange are mentioned, and the hanging gardens alternate with *Schrebergärten*, little plots on which German Sunday gardeners grow vegetables for family consumption. Nebuchadnezzar and Nimrod frequently alternate as kings; whenever one revolts successfully against the other, the vanquished serves as a throne for the other. We hear that Nebuchadnezzar has spent nine hundred years as Nimrod's throne before recently assuming power himself. Thus, a sort of suspended time condition is created which is somewhat similar to certain stretches in Thomas Mann's Joseph novels. Similar anachronisms are found in large numbers in *Romulus* where the Minister for Domestic Affairs, for instance, wishes to pacify the aroused populace by promising a social security system for long-shoremen or where a court attendant who is watching the invading Germanic hordes says to another: "When we leave here, one might say that antiquity has come to an end."

A similarly fluid treatment of the place of action can be found in Dürrenmatt's comedies. Thus, the stage directions for *An Angel Comes To Babylon* speak of "an immeasurable sky above everything in whose center the Andromeda fog hovers . . . menacingly close, filling almost half the stage background."⁴¹ Akki's dwelling in the second act is "a wild mixture of objects from all ages;"⁴² Nebuchadnezzar's throne room "is divided by means of a gigantic lattice wall into a foreground and a background which extends into a limitless distance."⁴³ In *The Marriage* the room whose furniture represents

styles from all epochs changes under the influence of the raging street battles into a shambles, as does the well-ordered world of the prosecutor. The end of a historical epoch and the beginning of another is clearly expressed in the stage design and scenery of *Romulus*.

In regard to language Dürrenmatt follows the technique of the alienation effect, used previously by Wedekind, Sternheim, and Brecht, in which the speaker either exaggerates grotesquely or speaks in a manner which is incongruent with his social status, his educational background or the present condition of his emotions. Dürrenmatt delights in using *aperçus*, often of a very bitter variety. Some examples follow: "Justice is not a guillotine but a mutual agreement;"⁴⁴ "the best way to conceal a small scandal is to stage a big one;"⁴⁵ "whenever the state is about to commit wholesale murder, it uses the word 'fatherland';"⁴⁶ "the more perfect a state is, the greater is its need for stupid civil servants;"⁴⁷ and finally Claire Zachanassian's abysmally bitter words: "The world made me into a whore, now I will change it into a whorehouse."⁴⁸ The change from naturalistic prose into lyric or rhapsodic speech, which we find in some of the comedies, reminds us of some expressionist plays. Occasionally, however, Dürrenmatt just parodies elevated speech whereas other instances represent a more sincere attempt at creating a poetic speech of his own. In *An Angel* he tries to imitate the form and meter of certain Babylonian poems.

Dürrenmatt's penchant for the grotesque expresses itself chiefly in the field of situation comedy. In his brilliant essay *The Grotesque in Painting and Literature*⁴⁹ the late Wolfgang Kayser has attempted for the first time to furnish a definition as well as the beginning of a history of the grotesque in Western literature. In the grotesque we are dealing with the disintegration of logic, the combination of heterogeneous elements, the abolition of the order of time and place, a representation of nonsense, clothed in the robe of legitimacy. The absurd which is portrayed grotesquely always contains features of a real, if strongly alienated world, just as a caricature can be effective only if the original can still be recognized. Thus, the grotesque may either be a huge exaggeration or the integration of things or features which are in reality incapable of being combined. In general, the result of this process is incomprehensible and thus has a distinctly inhuman or extra-human quality.

The writer and creator of the grotesque usually fights against logic and rationalism and tries to disrupt the conventional chain reactions of our universe because he considers them untrue or deceptive.

The radically and consistently grotesque writer is convinced that everything is hollow and vain, that humans are only marionettes in the hands of a blind and malicious fate, and that their joys and sorrows are only shadowy dreams in the world of the dark and uncanny. Only rarely does the poet identify himself with this world and its inhabitants, for a frigid consciousness and a firm hand are required for the artistic expression of horror. The reader, on the other hand, tends to identify himself gradually until the grotesque becomes logical to him — a reaction which will be familiar to many readers of the works of Kafka, for instance. It is interesting and not without significance that the great ill-starred men of German literature — Lenz, Hoffmann, Grabbe, Büchner, Sternheim, Wedekind, to mention some — are also its satanical humorists, and the application of the grotesque technique seems to blossom in times of spiritual dissatisfaction.

A more thorough exploration of the grotesque element in Dürrenmatt's works would demand a separate treatment. Some examples may suffice here. Although the West Roman Empire is about to collapse, Romulus the Great goes to bed with a calm conscience because he has brought about the fall of Rome intentionally and for idealistic reasons. Out of the dark of his bedroom come nine concealed would-be assassins, one after the other: a Roman patrician appears out of nowhere, the minister of the interior from underneath the bed, the emperor of East Rome from the wardrobe, the valet from the closet, the minister of war from underneath the sofa, even the cook, and in the dead of night the emperor discusses with them their right to kill him. Finally, "each draws his dagger and approaches Romulus who sits calmly and unmoved; the daggers unite over his head. Just then one hears from the background a resounding, huge cry of tremendous fear: 'The Germans are coming!' Seized by panic everyone stumbles out through windows and doors. The emperor sits untouched."⁵⁰

Claire Zachanassian, the "old lady" on whom Gullen bases its hope for rescue, promises her native city at the beginning of her visit that she will not forsake her former fellow citizens. Her sweetheart of many years ago calls her "my little tigress" as in days of yore and enthusiastically slaps her left leg only to withdraw his hand with a pained expression. Claire comments: "That hurt, didn't it? You hit upon a metal hinge of my wooden leg." Three men behind the bench on which they are sitting act out the part of trees by waving their arms up and down. In a further attempt to recapture the mood of their youth, Ill kisses her right hand and flatters her: "The same cool

white hand as ever." Claire replies: "Wrong again. Also artificial. Ivory." Ill lets her hand go with horror. "Claire, is everything about you artificial?" "Almost. After a plane crash in Afghanistan. Was the only one to creep from the wreckage. Even the crew was dead. Can't be killed." The two blind men echo her: "Can't be killed, can't be killed."⁵¹

The end of *It Is Written* is also highly grotesque. The play deals with a rich and a poor man, in a city besieged by the enemy. Bernhard Knipperdollinck, a wealthy merchant of Münster, casts off his riches, renounces his wife and child, and takes to the road. Johann Bockelson from Leyden, an itinerant good-for-nothing, is chosen by the anabaptists to be their king and inherits Knipperdollinck's money, wife, and daughter. The end of the drama brings the voluntary death of Knipperdollinck and the involuntary death of his counterpart. Both jump from a window upon a roof and dance, the one in tattered rags, the other in a royal robe and crown, a huge full moon behind them. Finally, they dance off the roof and into town where we see them at the conclusion of the play, "with their limbs outstretched upon two giant wheels which are fastened to a slanted wall, so that both face upwards. They are clad only in rags."⁵²

In the preceding pages we have tried to point out some of the means with which Dürrenmatt works in order to produce a comical or tragicomical effect. If the application of such effects were central to the work itself, then the reproach that he is only a writer for the cabaret might have a basis in fact. But the witty idea always serves a serious cause in Dürrenmatt's plays, even if it is presented in a reverse, i.e. ironic manner. This thematic irony in Dürrenmatt's five comedies should be briefly discussed in conclusion.

In *It Is Written* the anabaptist movement serves the author as an example for the thought that every man's search for a god of his own and the realization of God's realm on earth usually leads to intolerance toward other men's solutions and even to the attempt to extirpate their form of paradise for the glory of one's own. To be sure, it is written that the last shall be the first, but this turns out to be a perilous promise if the last take it seriously. Many a religious movement, born as an ideal, ends in absurdity and crime; beauty turns ugly, the pure is sullied, and the new faith's will to maintain itself leads to a chain of unhappy wars.

In *Romulus the Great* (its subtitle: an unhistorical historical comedy) the author at first leads his public astray. The reader is supposed to think the Great is in reality small because he surrenders

the glorious Roman Empire to the invading Germans without a fight and takes a much greater interest in raising chickens than in politics. Yet the Roman weakling turns out to be a great human who believes that Rome lost its right to live when it chose force and tyranny and forsook the ideals of humanity and truth which it knew so well. He distrusts all great words, chief among them the word and concept "Fatherland." "I have not betrayed Rome, Rome has betrayed herself," he defends himself.⁵³ His heroism consists of the fact that he is totally unheroic.

In *The Marriage of Milord Mississippi* Dürrenmatt places a number of modern fools upon the stage: a woman who lives only for the moment and whose morals are valid only for the moment; a man who rigidly fights for the law that has become meaningless; a Marxist for whom the end justifies the means; a Christian who wishes to change the world from within by means of love. Each plays his part in the "eternal comedy, so that his Glory may shine, made brighter through our weakness."

An Angel Comes to Babylon was to be the first in a series of plays that would explain and dramatically present the building of the tower of Babel. Dürrenmatt calls the plans for the tower "one of the most grandiose if nonsensical undertakings of humanity, all the more important since we see ourselves involved in similar attempts today."⁵⁴ His plan was to call the next play *The Fellow Travellers* (*Die Mitmacher*) and to show in it how everyone opposed the construction and how it came about just the same. But the story of the actual play — an angel carries to earth a cherub-like girl whom he is to deliver to the poorest of the poor — follows the pattern of the story of the salvation. Babylon is a world of intrigue, greed for power, hypocrisy and hardheartedness, a world which proves to be quite unworthy of the divine present. The only human figure with a heart receives God's grace, and although the beggar Akki has to flee from Babylon, and at the end of the play we see him traversing an unending desert in the dark of night, holding the girl Kurrubi by his hand, he does not lose his faith in the world: "And I love an earth which still exists, an earth of beggars, unique in happiness and unique in danger, colorful and wild, marvellous in its potential, an earth which I vanquish again and anew, mad with its beauty, in love with its image, threatened by power and undefeated."⁵⁵

In his notes to *The Visit* Dürrenmatt says that Ill's death at the end of the play was both meaningful and meaningless. "It would have been completely meaningful in the mythical realm of an antique

polis but the story takes place in Gullen." The miserable grocer who only slowly realizes his guilt toward the end of his life typifies a community which gradually gives in to temptation, neither with malice nor with intent but only through human weakness which lends itself to tragicomedy rather than to tragedy.

Basically, Dürrenmatt is not a philosophical playwright. His works are not based on a clearly recognizable faith, problem or party line. His fundamental theme is the role of evil in man, not only in the comedies but also in the radio plays, the more serious dramas and, of course, the detective stories. Since evil has seized all humanity in our day and tears all of us along, whether we want to or not, it is the function of the poet to describe the collapse of all values through the process of parody and ridicule and to find a possible meaning in apparent non-sense. If we find tragic comedies as well as comical tragedies in Dürrenmatt's works, the difference lies in the faith, proclaimed in the more hopeful plays, that the individual may save himself through a more militant conscience. Like the beggar Akki the author seems to warn the world: "In order to survive the weak must recognize the world so that they do not blindly walk a path which trails off into the dark."⁵⁶

NOTES

1. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke*, Prosa IV (Frankfurt, 1955), p. 40.
2. Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Fragments*, ed. Ernst Kamnitzer (Dresden, 1929), p. 619.
3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Carl J. Burkhardt, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt, 1956), p. 39.
4. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke*, Lustspiele II (Frankfurt, 1954), p. 153/4.
5. *ibid.*, 243.
6. *ibid.*, 243.
7. *ibid.*, 258.
8. *ibid.*, 312.
9. Albert Soengel, *Im Banne des Expressionismus* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 650.
10. *ibid.*, 651.
11. Carl Sternheim, *Bürger Schippel* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 10.
12. *ibid.*, 12.
13. *ibid.*, 17.
14. *ibid.*, 18.
15. *ibid.*, 24.
16. *ibid.*, 28.
17. *ibid.*, 9.
18. *ibid.*, 10.
19. *ibid.*, 13.
20. *ibid.*, 9.
21. *ibid.*, 23.
22. *ibid.*, 9.
23. *ibid.*, 13.
24. *ibid.*, 20/1.
25. *ibid.*, 24.
26. *ibid.*, 26.
27. Bernhard Diebold, *Anarchie im Drama* (Frankfurt, 1925), p. 84.
28. Julius Bab, *Der Wille zum Drama* (Berlin, 1919), p. 221/2.
29. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Theaterprobleme* (Zürich, 1955), p. 43/4.

30. *ibid.*, 44.
31. *ibid.*, 47/8.
32. *ibid.*, 46.
33. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (Zürich, 1952), p. 8.
34. *ibid.*, 8.
35. *ibid.*, 11.
36. *ibid.*, 27.
37. *ibid.*, 41.
38. *ibid.*, 71.
39. *ibid.*, 86.
40. *Theaterprobleme*, 29.
41. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* (Zürich, 1957), p. 7.
42. *ibid.*, 37.
43. *ibid.*, 65.
44. *Ehe*, 32.
45. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Romulus der Grosse* (Zürich, 1957), p. 11.
46. *ibid.*, 59.
47. *Engel*, 41.
48. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, (Zürich, 1956), p. 69.
49. Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Grotteske in Malerei und Dichtung* (Oldenburg, 1960).
50. *Romulus*, 67.
51. *Alte Dame*, 28.
52. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Es steht geschrieben* (Basel, 1947), p. 152.
53. *Romulus*, 65.
54. *Engel*, 95.
55. *Engel*, 94.
56. *Engel*, 64.

The New Dramatists: 2

Arnold Wesker

by HENRY GOODMAN

The American theatre of the thirties is now easily characterized by the qualities to be found in its most representative dramatist, Clifford Odets: a revolutionary ardor and innocence, a sense of being rooted in the times and directly mirroring the society and its distresses, and a talent for lyrical speech that is natural, fresh and of the character, with minor lapses into the conventional and "Broadway." A generation later, the British theatre is being agitated by the social zeal of young playwrights who may likely turn this present period into the "fervent years" of the modern English drama. And prominent among the group is the twenty-eight year old Socialist writer Arnold Wesker whose first plays bring Odets immediately to mind.

But the two generations are not exactly parallel. We can see, for instance, that Wesker, unlike Odets in his time, is not altogether typical of his generation. But he is certainly one of its most eloquent voices. Wesker works in an old-style realism which he brings to life with his personal involvement and his gift for the rich, idiomatic speech of special groups — the farmers, the laborers, or the immigrants living in the East End.

The awakening spirit, which has been stirring even in the West End, can be detected among young artists in their mounting impatience with the established mode of doing things: in particular, with the star system, which prompts actors to exploit themselves at the expense of the play, and with a quality of writing epitomized by Terence Rattigan. In a theatre magazine such as *Encore*, for instance, one encounters eager explorations of the "method," the Group Theatre, and plays with social significance. Arthur Miller and Bertolt Brecht, for example, receive friendly attention from the opponents of the Establishment. The opposition is united on the need to reform and revitalize the British theatre. Furthermore, the insurgent playwrights seem held together by the common bond of social pro-

test, though this gives them a wide area to range over when it comes to the subject matter of their plays. And when it comes to style, each dramatist is highly individual and independent of the others. In a loosely related group made up of Shelagh Delaney, John Osborne, John Arden and Harold Pinter, Wesker distinctly stands apart as being more political, more personal, and more traditionally realistic than the others. A political dramatist in the tradition of the thirties, Wesker uses the stage as a platform and a pulpit for the New Left; in this respect he is more outspoken and probably farther left than his compatriots. Miss Delaney's characters — funny, pathetic, bewildered — are outside of politics, while Pinter's wander through the haunted, cluttered corridors of modern existence in search of meaning and identity. But Wesker's people live politics, idealism, and reform in an everyday world.

Wesker, in fact, seems oddly behind the times, if we agree with Ortega y Gasset that the inevitable tendency in modern art is to deny "living forms," to dehumanize. Gasset's definition of the new sensibility as a retreat of the artist from pathos and "humanity" led him several years ago to observe that the possible combinations existing within the old romantic/naturalistic forms of the nineteenth century were perhaps finally exhausted. He suggested that an artist today who attempted to compose "another Wagnerian opera, another naturalistic novel" was likely to fail. But Arnold Wesker, for one, did not consider himself doomed to failure when he began his trilogy of working-class life, casting it in the "well-made" form as it was long ago remodeled by Ibsen and Shaw. Wesker, in other words, tackled his political theme in the traditional manner of the discussion play.

Furthermore, Wesker does not share Gasset's view of what might possibly be the contemporary artist's attitude toward art itself: that art is a thing of "no consequence," because the young Englishman sees the arts as a means of doing positive good for the depressed classes of his country. In this respect, too, he is old-fashioned, certainly at opposite ends from Eugène Ionesco, for instance, who denounces the use of the stage as an ideological platform. With typical and engaging fervor Wesker wrote in *Encore* of November-December 1958:

I want to write about people in a way that will somehow give them an insight to an aspect of life which they may not have had before; and further, I want to impart to them some of the enthusiasm I have for that life. I want to teach. . . . It is the bus driver,

the housewife, the miner and the Teddy Boy to whom I should like to address myself.

Art, to Wesker's mind, is a tool with which to equip people for "the enjoyment of living, for its better understanding." The title of his article is like a banner: "Let Battle Commence!"

Almost the first work that Arnold Wesker attempted was a trilogy in which his didactic and social purpose was clearly demonstrated: *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots*, and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem*. Each play had its première at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, one of England's newest theatres which, by its policy of presenting new plays, is linked to the new movement in the English drama. His actual first play, *The Kitchen*, was not produced until after the trilogy had been launched. Its initial performance was at another of the strongholds of the new drama, the Royal Court Theatre in London.

All four plays lean heavily on autobiography. Born of Jewish parents in London's East End, Wesker's formal education has been limited. Like other young insurgent writers in England today, he is not a "university wit," but he can count in his background his various experiences as farm worker, carpenter's mate, bookseller's assistant, kitchen porter, cook, and apprentice pastrycook. All of these jobs show up in his plays as do the members of his family, his friends, and the many private and public events which have shaped his opinions. The author's personal involvement makes the plays seem more like confession than invention.

In *The Kitchen* we detect themes that the playwright asserts more boldly in his later plays: the brotherhood of man, the destructive nature of competition, the joys of individual creativity, and the paralysis that comes with apathy. The slim plot acts out the hectic routine during one day in the kitchen of the Tivoli restaurant. Everything about the cooking and serving procedures seems carefully documented. The cooks are of various nationalities, and through them the author, indulging a taste for allegory, is able to illustrate the national antagonisms that plague the world. Even war breaks out in the kitchen when the fierce pressures of service during the rush hours turn a young German cook into a bully and finally cause him to go momentarily berserk. In his introduction, where he feels forced, as he says, to make annoying but necessary explanations, the playwright states: "The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me it is a kitchen: where people come and go and cannot stay long enough to understand each other, and friendship, loves, and en-

mities are forgotten as quickly as they are made." Wesker, fearful that the action by itself does not make the point, gives almost these same words to one of his characters. But despite his tendency to explain, to document, to urge his point of view too much, Wesker's first play has humor and warmth and talent.

One of the characters toward the close of *Chicken Soup with Barley* talks about the days of his youth: "I wish you'd have known us in the old days . . . All the songs we sang together and the strikes and the rallies . . . Everyone in the East End was going somewhere. The East End was a big mother." For the speaker the ideals are dead. This first play in the Wesker trilogy chronicles the disenchantment of British Communists over a twenty-year period from the optimism of the thirties to the lassitude of the fifties. In particular, it is the story of a Jewish working-class family, the Kahns, living in the East End. It begins on a day in 1936 when the family along with other Party members successfully break up a Fascist demonstration. Romantic and dedicated, they find their inspiration in the comrades who have died in Spain. The first act tells us of the time of their innocence and optimism and is reminiscent of the expressions of faith in a "better world" that once rang through Odets' *Awake and Sing!*

The personal story of Harry and Sarah Kahn and their children is played against the tragic events of the two decades to follow. In that period Harry, weak and shiftless, becomes a helpless invalid after two strokes. Using an Ibsen mode of symbolism Wesker gives apathy a physical dimension just as the Norwegian once gave nineteenth-century corruption a physical presence in the illness of Dr. Rank and Oswald.

The years bring disillusionment with the Party. The Kahns' daughter Ada and her husband Dave Simmonds in 1946 no longer cherish the ideal of "the splendid and heroic working class." Why? In Spain Dave saw firsthand the cold-blooded political activity of the Party members; and in the war against Hitler he saw the indifference of the liberators who did not know or care about the reasons for the war. Other friends of the Kahn circle defect from the cause after the Soviets shoot the entire committee of the Jewish Anti-Fascist League: "Shot, Sarah! In our land of Socialism."

In December 1956 Harry's complete disintegration coincides with the collapse of the ideals brought on at last by the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. The Kahn's son Ronnie returns from Paris, where he has worked as a cook. Once an ardent

Socialist writer, he now feels sick in spirit, disappointed in the fellowship of labor (the "kitchen" theme again) and disgusted with Soviet power politics. Only Sarah Kahn still cherishes the beliefs she held twenty years before. Despite the betrayal of an ideal by the political opportunists she still clings to the ideal as long as it means "freedom and brotherhood." If a fuse blows, her argument runs, should one stop having electricity? Socialism is her light, she says, and if it means fighting it also means kindness and love. When Ada was a child and nearly died of diphtheria, a neighbor's act of kindness saved her life. "It was Mrs. Bernstein's soup. Ada still has the taste in her mouth — chicken soup with barley. She says it is a friendly taste — ask her." Sarah's final appeal to her son is: "Please, Ronnie, don't let me finish this life thinking I lived for nothing. We got through, didn't we? We got scars but we got through. You hear me, Ronnie? You've got to care, you've got to care or you'll die."

The chief Socialist symbol turns out to be the Jewish mother, the source of strength and comfort. She sets you at ease in the home by offering you food immediately when you enter. Papa is a weakling and a dreamer, so she must make the decisions and nag at him to show some spunk. And she is the guardian of the faith, though in this case religion is replaced by a faith in Socialism. But it is a Socialism of brotherly love, personal integrity and a naive loyalty to good intentions. It is a highly romantic Socialism which exposes most of the believers to severe disappointments.

The second play, *Roots*, leaves the circle of the Kahn family and uses Ronnie as the offstage spokesman for Wesker's beliefs. Ronnie speaks, as it were, from the wings. He is engaged to Beattie Bryant, a Norfolk farm girl, who returns to her family to prepare them for Ronnie's visit. He has educated her, made her aware of life's riches, poured ideas into her, and pulled her out of a back-country lethargy and ignorance. She tries, in turn, to emancipate her family, but their condition is hopeless. Rivalling the accomplishments of nineteenth century naturalism Wesker smashes all romantic illusions about the purity of rural life and exposes the meanness of people who keep aloof from ideas, who are concerned only with their digestions; who keep their minds forever on the aches of their guts, which they abuse with overeating; who dwell gleefully on the diseases of their friends and the intimate disgraces of senility. Though they live in the country, as Beattie remarks, they have "no majesty." Wesker is not merely exploiting local color; his observation and his ear are keen. For two acts he creates an accurate picture of cultural depression while Beattie

lectures her family on this failing and that, never expressing anything but Ronnie's words and thoughts, the parrot-like creature of Pygmalion. Then Ronnie fails to show up and in a letter to Beattie confesses to his despair at the gulf between them. He admits that his ideas of inspiring a new life are "quite useless and romantic if I'm really honest."

In the last moments of the play Beattie, like Nora Helmer, grows up and becomes truly eloquent. While her family are industriously eating, not wishing to pass up a meal even if the engagement party has gone wrong, the abandoned girl finds words of her own at last. She exhorts her indifferent family not to settle for "slop songs and film idols" and everything third rate. "The whole stinkin' commercial world insults us and we don't give a damn." In the concluding play of the trilogy Ronnie recalls Beattie as one who "could have been a poem — I gave her words — maybe she became one."

With *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* Wesker returns to the Kahn family. He writes of daughter Ada and her husband Dave Simmonds and their thirteen years in rural Norfolk, where they attempt to live Socialism according to William Morris. Dave has deserted industrial society, the evils of progress, the insults of the factory, in order to make his work and his family life an idyllic experience: the barn next to the house is his shop where he makes furniture by hand. But again, as in *Chicken Soup*, the years teach a bitter lesson so that in the final scene Dave and Ada abandon their "Jerusalem" and move back to London where Dave will set up shop in a basement. Speaking through Sarah Kahn, Wesker makes the point that Socialism must be lived with other people; it is a community way of life, not a private escape.

Wesker is honest in dramatizing the hardships that finally drive the couple from their paradise; commercial competition, of course; but the cynicism and doubts of friends and family are even harder to take. ("Listen to me, Dave, and go home before you're dirtied up.") But mostly it is the protagonist's own inadequacies which bring about his defeat. These he recognizes in himself: "I've reached the point where I can face the fact that I'm not a prophet." Dave has been unable to shake off the habits of the factory. The other Kahns act as chorus to the central action, mostly disapproving of the events, but underlining Wesker's fervent belief in the continuous human need for hope and dedication. The author's optimism drives him to assert that failure is never final.

In each of his plays Wesker dramatizes a defeat which by his

optimism he transmutes into something hopeful: Sarah's faith, Beattie's awakening, Dave's self-recognition. Wesker leaves his characters with something to build on. In this way he is much like the Odets of *Awake and Sing!* He asserts with wondrous innocence and ardor that man is meant for better things, which he can attain if only he is not apathetic or easily discouraged or confused by wrong values.

Wesker is like Odets with respect to language. His ear is sharp, his ability to record the speech of the London proletariat is sure. In a family argument we hear the following: "You're very wonderful I suppose, yes? You're the clever one." / "I don't get my facts mixed up, anyway." / "Per, per, per, per, per! Listen to him! My politician!" How much like the cadences of Bessie Berger and her family: "That's what you want, Ralphie? Your name in the paper?" / "... Didn't I want to take up tap dancing, too?" / "So take lessons. Who stopped you?" But Wesker's speech differs in an important respect from Odets'. They go their separate ways at the point where character and, more particularly, stage traditions exert the pressure. Odets' is never far from the Broadway propensity for "tough talk" and the hard character (with the soft heart), while Wesker cannot altogether escape the British taste for well-bred "smart talk." Moe's "She wantsa see me squirm, only I don't squirm for dames" is in sharp contrast to Ronnie's "It wasn't sordid, you know Dave. I know I didn't see it through to the end but it wasn't sordid." It is difficult to imagine Wesker's dialogue escaping entirely the influence of Ratigan. And on the question of character, though both Odets' and Wesker's people are mainly big city working-class, the American, despite the number of philosophic old men in his plays, leans a little to the exotic in his tough dames (Hennie, Lorna) and his cab drivers, gangsters and gamblers. Beside them, Wesker's characters are unspectacular, distinguished mainly by their political earnestness or their extreme lack of the same, and an earthiness, a sentiment, and humanity which takes hold of its audience in the most ordinary plot circumstances.

Since Wesker is of the left, it is logical to ask how he compares with Brecht, who has, of course, aroused the liveliest interest among the insurgents in the British theatre. When thrust alongside of Brecht, Wesker is obviously sentimental and impetuous; he cannot contain his righteous anger in the face of injustice and smugness. Brecht, by nature a skeptic, is the wise and knowing ancient who never shows surprise at the world's wrongs; he is the ironist who can

regard the face of evil without a sense of personal outrage. This does not mean that he is indifferent: he is a strategist who, taking evil for granted, is studying the ways to neutralize it. The difference between Wesker and Brecht might be thought of as the difference between autobiography and history.

Together, Wesker's plays are a statement of the vitality of belief. To continue to care for ideals in the face of contradictions and betrayals assures one of life. His ardor and his certainty are something to be cherished in the contemporary theatre, if only to balance our too heavy diet of despair and doubt. But too much enthusiasm has its dangers as well. It leads Wesker to bubble over with too much to say at once. He enters too readily into his characters to prompt them with his words. Not only does he make himself into one of the characters (Ronnie), but he can be seen darting among the others to cue them. Employing the familiar form of nineteenth-century realism, Wesker is admittedly a didactic writer. Furthermore, he is incapable of that detachment of the artist from the "lived reality" which is so much a part of the dehumanization of contemporary theatre; he is much too earnest in his beliefs and too eager to share his point of view to be lured into the amusing and puzzling excursions of the avant-garde. His didacticism demands clarity and the direct approach. But he does not sacrifice the drama to the idea. The Kahn family argue eternally about Socialism, but they argue as characters that are round and full and not merely as ciphers parroting political slogans. Wesker's command of language, his lyricism, is already accomplished. With his gift for a language of feeling and with his understanding of character he can become even more than what the enthusiasms of the moment portend.

Theatre Survey

New York, 1960-61

by GERALD WEALES

By the time this autopsy of the New York drama season of 1960-61 gets into print, the new season, if it is anything like the old, will already have begun to die. One group of academic drama enthusiasts abandoned Broadway years ago, but I am in the other group, the one that approaches each year hopefully, looking for imaginative variations within the demanding frame of convention and economics, only to have expectation drown in the steady stream of sameness. For a time, off-Broadway promised the vitality that Broadway did not offer, but even there — where there is at least more variety — the pleasures have become fewer. Now, with Ionesco and Behan on Broadway and *Ladies' Night in a Turkish Bath* off-Broadway, the line between the two is so thin that only Actors Equity can draw it. This report, then, will treat the New York theater as a whole and the prevailing tone will be an unhappy one. Conventionally, one says of each drama season that it is the dullest in years; last year, the conventional was the factual.

The American playwrights looked particularly sad. Tennessee Williams was the only one of the major dramatists to put in an appearance at all and his offering, *Period of Adjustment*, was as disappointing as it was atypical. After *Sweet Bird of Youth*, in which his violence had turned into self-parody, the idea of a quieter Williams was attractive, but there was a distance between the promise and the product. The play's action is double. Ralph Bates, an ex-war hero turned tame by suburbia, lets himself be convinced that his marriage needs saving; George Haverstick, a virginal rake, lets himself be convinced that his new marriage is worth having. Both problems are solved by Broadway's current panacea, sex, as Williams brings the curtain down on the joining of the two couples. With its easy satire on suburban living and its conventional and-so-to-bed ending, it might have been written by any of the Broadway regulars. There are occasional glimpses of Williams as in Isabel's description of the whole world as a neurasthenic ward and her a student nurse in it; lines like this one may convince the devoted that the play as a whole is a satire on Broadway's idea of the serious play, but, from the beginning of his career, Williams has mixed the commonplace and the imaginative. Here, the former has triumphed. The only other American playwrights with more than routine reputations on hand this year were Arthur Laurents with *Invitation to a March* and Edward Albee with the double bill, *The American Dream* and *The Death of Bessie Smith*, but I did not see either production. The Laurents play, which I read, is another attack on the suburban mentality (I would like to see a good solid pro-suburbs play one day soon), a variant reading of the story of *Sleeping Beauty* in which the heroine falls asleep each time her fiancé describes the life that they will lead; the idea is a funny one,

but Laurents's talents do not run to lightness, the quality that *March* so obviously needs.

There were no surprises among the Broadway comedies. There may have been more gags than usual (Broadway comedies have lately traded wisecracks for sentiment) in Jean Kerr's *Mary, Mary*, but not enough of them were funny to forgive the failure of plot and characterization; besides, the production was staged so inadequately that all of the performers — even an actress as good as Barbara Bel Geddes — read their lines like stand-up comedians and waited for the laughs, even when they did not come. Neil Simon's *Come Blow Your Horn* was more amusing simply because it was directed by Stanley Prager in the manner of George Abbott before he was lost to the musicals; it went soft at the end, as American farces usually do, but for the most part it stayed brisk, giving the audience no chance to notice that it was about nothing at all. The one unusual comedy was Arnold Weinstein's *Red Eye of Love*, an often very funny play which, fortunately, had an extremely good off-Broadway production. A case has been made for the play as a satire on American life — using O. O. Martin's meat department store as a starting point — but that is making more of *Red Eye* than it demands. There are a number of incidental bits of satire, thrusts almost at random, but for the most part the play is a comic testimonial to Weinstein's preoccupation (one that I share) with the movies. The three main characters are the innocent hero, the endangered heroine and the grasping villain, on which Weinstein plays all kinds of variations, and the clichés are all from silent-film melodrama. At times, it looks as though Weinstein might turn a popular form to acid, as Nathanael West did the Horatio Alger story in *A Cool Million*, but despite some tough touches — the hero's desire to invent a doll that will get sick and die, thus bringing happiness to many children and riches to himself — the dramatist seems less intent on satirical form than on incidental fun.

As usual, most of the new American plays that were not standard comedies, were adaptations and, again as usual, most of them were unsuccessful commercially and artistically. They ranged from puffed-out television plays, like James Costigan's pious, noisy *Little Moon of Alban*, to skeletonized novels, like Millard Lampell's version of John Hersey's *The Wall*, in which the novel's sense of the ghetto dwindled to the barest background. Robert L. Joseph's *Face of a Hero* was a bit of both, a novel (by Pierre Boulle) turned into a television play turned into a theater piece; a potentially interesting account of a man's being corrupted by his incorruptibility, it never lived up to its possibility. Tad Mosel's Pulitzer Prize winner, *All the Way Home*, was the most celebrated of this year's adaptations, but I found it difficult to join in the celebration. Based on James Agee's moving novel, *A Death in the Family*, the Mosel play kept much of the incidental material of the book, but the heart had gone out of it. Mosel's was just another period family drama.

Nor did musicals give comfort, as they sometimes have, where straight plays have failed. Of the hits, I have not seen the Lerner-Loewe *Camelot* or the more recent *Carnival*, but Meredith Willson's *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* is, in book and music, as primly vulgar as his long-run bore, *The Music Man*. *Do Re Mi*, with music by Jule Styne, book by Garson Kanin, lyrics by Comden and Greene, all of whom have good work behind them, and with Nancy Walker in the cast, had a hopeful look about it, but its star, Phil

Silvers, like Lucille Ball in *Wildcat*, seemed unable to project a television personality from stage (this despite Silvers's work in *High Button Shoes* and *Top Banana*) and both book and score were infected with the soapiness of contemporary theater, most obvious in the massed singing of a message about wanting to love someone, just one someone. Revues were few and feeble. Charles Gaynor's *Show Girl*, tailor-made for the considerable talents of Carol Channing, proved again that the inside preoccupation with show business yields only satirical diminishing returns. Although the revue form has become more and more a stranger to Broadway, it is flourishing off-Broadway, in clubs and coffee houses where miniature revues — some of them ad lib affairs — are put on for short runs; the best one that I saw was at a place called Phase 2 — *Which Way Is Uptown?* with music by Jim Wise and sketches and lyrics by Richard Bimonte and George Haimsohn.

The two liveliest plays of the season came not only from the same country — England — but from the same theater — Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in London's East End. Miss Littlewood directed the American production of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*, but Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* was staged by Tony Richardson and George Devine, veterans of the English Stage Company, England's other seed-bed for the anti-country-house drama. Since Behan's bustling-boyo nonsense, his offensive and tiresome self-advertisement, had made him a public figure in this country before the production of *The Hostage*, I approached the play fully planning to dislike it. I was won over, first, by its exuberance, the feel of a production in which everyone appeared to be enjoying himself, and, second, by its irreverence toward all things Irish, English and American. These qualities, plus its healthy bawdy and its scatter-gun satire, made it a delight to watch, but its effects might have been momentary had it not had real strength underneath its chaotic surface. Its central point — that all of us are responsible for the death of any of us — comes clearly through the hilarity and places the kidding of politics and nationalism in a particularly harsh perspective. The toughness of the play is most apparent near the end, after the death of the English soldier. The Irish girl kneels beside his body and begins a standard Irish-drama, death-of-the-young-man lament, as though Behan were saying, *and now for an Irish tear*. Just as he begins to suck the audience into the scene, to get them to accept it at its sentimental face value, he pulls the English soldier to his feet, lets him sing "The Bells of Hell" and thus, in the best Brechtian manner, refuses to let the audience forget its own culpability in a good cry.

A Taste of Honey is certainly much less impressive as a play than *The Hostage* is, but its production was even better. Joan Plowright's performance as the girl gave her an opportunity (as *The Entertainer* did not) to show what a remarkable actress she is, and Angela Lansbury's lusty mother reminded me how much she has been wasted in Hollywood. In cold print, Miss Delaney's plot sounds like an 18-year-old's idea of what life in the raw is all about: a young girl, whose mother is a whore, has an affair with a Negro sailor, who deserts her; a friendly homosexual, who wants to mother her and the child, sees her through her fears about the pregnancy. At the end, Josephine is facing the future with resolution which is, I suppose, the point of the whole thing; at least, I seem to remember Miss Delaney's telling a New

York interviewer that the important thing is that the girl is going to have the baby. The play is neither as lurid or as sentimental as it sounds in this summary, for the playwright has a gift for lively dialogue and she has a good sense of the interplay of personalities.

Another of the new English dramatists, Arnold Wesker, was represented by *Roots*, the second play of the trilogy which was recently published in this country. The production was a weak one, but the play itself seems not particularly healthy, a familiar enough working of the old dramatic bromide about the city-living child who comes back to struggle with the ignorance and prejudices of his (in this case, her) country family. Its one virtue was a suggestion that the author was kidding the heroine most of the time. From England, too, came Sandy Wilson's *Valmouth*, but a musical adaptation of a Ronald Firbank novel, particularly one as lovingly chi-chi as this, demanded too special an audience to flourish long.

From France came Jean Anouilh's *Becket* and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* although the first, with Peter Glenville as director and Laurence Olivier as Becket, was rather more English than French and the second, with Joseph Anthony directing and Eli Wallach and Zero Mostel in the leads, had a Broadway look about it. Anouilh, who, as he admitted in a *New York Times* article, knows his history is inaccurate, presents Becket as a Saxon, collaborating with and then defying the Normans, always in the interests of his people. The play is a diffuse affair, shifting its emphasis from the political implications to the personal friendship (love, it is suggested) of Becket and Henry II, finally losing itself in Becket's religious concerns. I recognize that there is much truth in the complaints of some of my purist friends who insist that Olivier is far too intellectual an actor, that you can almost see his mind working on stage. The results of that mental effort, however, are usually so much more rewarding than some of the more visceral performers that I enjoy Olivier, even at his most mannered; when, in *Becket*, he maneuvered himself, arms spread out, to a spot in front of the altar where — stance, light, color — the whole scene was obvious El Greco, I accepted that there was contrivance in the effect and took pleasure in it all the same.

Rhinoceros, even with Zero Mostel's celebrated on-stage metamorphosis, was a rather dull play. Ionesco has always struck me as the thinnest of the French avant-garde, a playwright of surface rather than substance. He is at his best in a short play — *The Chairs*, for instance — but *Rhinoceros* looks as though it had been padded to make it full-length. Much of it, particularly the scene in Act III between Berenger and Daisy, is so ploddingly specific that it sounds as revolutionary as George Kelly, and Ionesco's ponderous logician who clutters up much of Act I made me wish that the playwright had Giraudoux's wit to give style and meaning to the character. The idea of the play, that people should at first be horrified by the rhinoceri and then decide that it is fashionable to become one, is soundly satiric, but once the point is made, only repetition lies ahead.

As usual, there were a few oddities in New York, performers for their own sake, such as Nichols and May, Elsa Lanchester (whose naughty songs give me the pip) and Marcel Marceau. Although Margaret Rutherford's brief appearance was not of this order, it might as well have been. She was in something called *Farewell, Farewell Eugene*, a play of sorts which sensibly

kept out of her way. One of the high points of the 1960-61 season for me was the sight of Miss Rutherford furtively bolting a salami sandwich while pretending to genteel innocence. I do not mean to belittle Miss Rutherford's art, which I love this side of idolatry, when I suggest that a theatrical season might do well to offer something more than a salami sandwich, even one devoured with skill and grace, as its finest moment.

A Look Round the English Theatre, 1961

by E. MARTIN BROWNE

The English Theatre, like England itself, is learning to live in a changing world. It has become the older sister of television, that chit of a girl who married money. It has given up its late hours and tuxedos in the orchestra for a 7:30 curtain and an audience dressed the same way all over the house, and equally well able to pay orchestra prices in a land of prosperity and equality. The physical scene of its plays has changed from drawing room to living room, and its personnel from the aristocracy who didn't work to the democracy who do work or strike work, or even further, to the derelicts who don't work. But despite all this acclimation, there remains firmly established that English sense of class.

It's lively, the English theatre, no doubt about that. After the post-war doldrums, the last ten years have seen a surge of new vitality and this season it is no whit diminished. New theatre-buildings are planned, new managements with a policy come into being, young dramatists reach the boards; and a healthy export-import trade goes on with Paris and New York.

The two managements which have opened a new field to English dramatic writers have been situated outside the West End — as one would expect, for even in London the central commercial theatre is too expensive for experiment. One of them has just lost its leader and may not survive the loss. For Joan Littlewood, who has left Theatre Workshop at the Theatre Royal, Stratford E., for a prolonged change of air, is an outsize person, and although she has aimed to create a company of artists, the very opposite of a dictatorship, her dynamism has been the driving force of her organization and the loss of it may well be catastrophic. For the foundations of Theatre Workshop have been eroded by its very success; shows and actors carefully nurtured in the East End have been transferred to the West End and become submerged in the commercial jungle, so that the remnant is weak.

New York has sampled her quality in *A Taste of Honey* and *The Hostage*. For another, I visited the second-year musical *Fings Aint Wot They Used T'be*. This, after a long West-End run, has kept its Littlewood quality of organized exuberance. Brothels are ever-popular as stage settings — at the moment we have also *Irma La Douce* from Paris and *Susie Wong* from the American

Orient. Naturally, the stage brothel bears a highly idealized relationship to life; but there's a warm naturalness about the characters which inhabit the British version, and one can accept them as real people.

Stratford E. has staged the latest revival of *Godot*, which makes one realize how powerfully the waiting for him has influenced some of our younger dramatists. Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, due in New York, is derived from Beckett but is more nihilistic; N. F. Simpson's *One Way Pendulum*, which I only caught on Television, is the first full-length example of his ability to make the fantastic seem to belong to the lives of the most ordinary people. This is how loopy we all are in a mad world!

The Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square is the other home of change. George Devine and his young colleagues have in the last few years offered a stage to many new directors and dramatists, some of whom have become established names already. Two of the dramatists have produced new work this summer.

Arnold Wesker, like several of this group, comes from earning his daily bread in other avocations. He was a pastrycook before he became a writer, and the present play *The Kitchen* is born of that experience. The first of the two acts, directed with brilliant orchestration by John Dexter, is one of the most convincing pieces of realism I have ever seen. It depicts a restaurant kitchen during the build-up from 'cold' to the lunch-hour rush. A great deal of technical skill has to be shown by the actor-cooks, and into the interstices of the pattern of mounting noise and hurry there have to be fitted certain personal exchanges. These lead in the quieter second act to reflective passages in which the multi-racial kitchen is seen as a microcosm of the world. Perhaps the analogy is a little naive, but we are convinced that it is suggested by a real experience.

Wesker, as New York had an opportunity to see in *Roots*, has courage and hope. John Osborne, most publicized and most powerful of this group of dramatists, takes a more jaundiced view of life. There are times in his new *Luther* when one is led to believe that constipation is the only reality for him as well as for his hero, so much is it harped upon. But the very fact that the author of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* has dared to take Luther for his subject is encouraging; and in the last resort it is not by abdominal criteria that this considerable play must be judged.

The first act of *Luther* is the best — and a complete surprise. It is laid in the Augustinian monastery of Erfurt into which Luther is received as a monk. The ritual is magnificently executed and the whole atmosphere admirably and sympathetically created. Luther emerges from the ranks of confessing monks as a doubter, and he is further disturbed by a visit from his miner-father whose abuse sharpens his revulsion. This is a good Freudian scene; and with it the personal motivations for Luther's rebellion are established.

After this, however, the play becomes bitty and only intermittently convincing. Osborne makes the mistake of opening Act II with a purely farcical presentation of the sale of Indulgences. If this is all that Luther is protesting against, he cannot be taken seriously; and when he does have a serious argument with Cardinal Catejan it is the Cardinal who carries us with him. The disdain shown for Luther by the Pope on his hunting expedition is not sufficiently contradicted for us by Luther's sermon, which convinces us that he is

a fine rhetorician but not that he is a great man. Here indeed is the weakness of the play: its hero may be powerfully written but he is not of world-changing size; or to put it another way, we are not made aware of the relationship between him and the world that is changed. Albert Finney's performance is fully adequate to Osborne's Luther, but not to history's. The nearest thing to the right size is Jocelyn Herbert's setting, with its dominating, faceless crucifix and its skilful and colorful suggestions of the various historical locations within a frame which has its own meaning.

Luther, for all its shortcomings, is a welcome phenomenon, both as marking a broadening of its author's outlook and also as an example of a similar trend in the theatre. To the dismay of most of the older public, the drawing-room has in recent years been displaced by the kitchen sink, which in its different way has proved no less confining as a theatrical locale. Now we have authors boldly launching out into the sea of history under the influence of Brecht's epic drama. This is something that the public has been waiting for, to judge by its response, and the managements who have been willing to risk the extra expenses have usually been justified.

The most important of these is "Stratford-on-Avon in London." Peter Hall, the young director who assumed two seasons ago the mantle of Glen Byam Shaw at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, has led his Governors to capture the Aldwych as the company's London home. He has rebuilt the stage to approximate that at Stratford-on-Avon and has been able, with the two theatres in his control, to inaugurate two admirable policies. He engages a sizeable body of actors on contracts of several years' duration, and while Stratford houses only the plays of its own bard the London home is "mainly for the plays of other dramatists, new and old."

The plays chosen here are of the richer and broader kind above referred to. Peter Hall commissioned a play from John Whiting, an author for whom the profession has a high regard but who had never made a success with the public and had given up writing for some years. He took Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, a terrifying documentary on devil-possession in seventeenth-century France and made from it *The Devils*. Urbain Grandier, the lecherous priest of Loudun, is brought to torture and death by the sexual imaginings concerning him of a nun whom he has never seen. Whiting has a sufficiently powerful imagination to develop this obsession as it spreads through the community and the play is strong meat with some distinguished writing in it. As I saw it, it failed to communicate much except horror, since there was no counterpoise to its evil.

Virginia McKenna, as the nun, did not seem to be having an experience which was new to her; this was no virgin imagination but one to which sexual excess came naturally; and the Sewerman who acted as Chorus was too low a type to be adequate to that role.

The two other plays in this season's repertory were French imports. Anouilh's *Becket*, "his best since *Antigone*" according to *The Times*, is the biggest success with Christopher Plummer much more happily cast as the King than was Anthony Quinn on Broadway, and Eric Porter as Becket. Giraudoux' *Ondine* sadly fails to come off: all the tricks in the theatrical basket are pulled out and one is left almost totally unmoved. Perhaps it is that Leslie Caron's heroine is too completely cold and one cannot believe in

her desire to become mortal for love. Perhaps this, like Anouilh's *Bal des Voleurs* a few seasons ago, is untranslatable into English terms. A contrast may be drawn with *The Rehearsal*, a firmly anglicized version of another Anouilh play which the Bristol Old Vic brought to London and which is for the most part successful, with a bedroom scene played by Alan Badel and Maggie Smith so as to exalt the theatregoer's heart. Here, it is the human beings who capture one, while in *Ondine* they hardly exist.

Of all the Aldwych offerings, the most completely enjoyable is not a play. *The Hollow Crown*, devised by John Barton, who as associate of Peter Hall has been responsible for a great improvement in the speaking of Shakespeare's verse at Stratford, is "an entertainment by and about the Kings and Queens of England." The cast consists of four speakers and a small body of musicians, all in evening dress. Chosen with exquisite taste, the extracts of poetry, prose, letters, drama and music succeed at once in conveying the whole range of English monarchical history from the absurd to the sublime and in keeping one entrancedly guessing what plum will next be pulled from the royal pie.

England is in process of losing many of her old theatres. Dating from the Victorian era of prosperity when the living stage had no rival, they are now mostly in a run-down condition and costly to repair. Their sites are usually central and, in the present scramble for land, too valuable for the theatre to afford. We struggle and protest, but only a very few, such as the beautiful eighteenth-century Theatre Royal at Bristol (tenanted by the Old Vic) can be preserved, and the number of theatres in the country is sadly shrinking. But there are items on the credit side. The London County Council is firm in its insistence that no theatre in central London be demolished unless another is planned to take its place; and it is proposing to take the major share in building the long-delayed National Theatre on the South Bank of the Thames. The City of London has both municipally and privately assisted Bernard Miles to realize his dream of the Mermaid Theatre, a 500-seat open-stage auditorium cunningly inserted into the walls of a dockside warehouse. There he keeps his stage vigorously alive with some new plays and more revivals. I saw *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, treated with a reverence which partly defeated its own ends because those who directed had not the necessary understanding of what the plays were about. I saw *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* sink into a mist of blood for lack of proper speaking and perceptive acting. It is sad indeed that this gallant and vital theatre cannot raise its standards of performance to match its ideals.

The provinces are the hardest hit in the loss of old theatres; but signs of a few new ones are to be seen. At Nottingham, the Playhouse, that admirable repertory company supported by the Arts Council, is to have a fine theatre built for it. At Newcastle-on-Tyne, the amateurs are creating a People's Arts Centre with the theatre at its core. The Questors of Ealing, an amateur group in the outskirts of London, are well along with building, largely by their own labor, the most significantly planned adaptable theatre in Britain. Birmingham is designing a new Civic Theatre for its famous 'rep', the death of whose founder, Sir Barry Jackson, recently left the whole profession mourning.

And at Chichester, in the west of Sussex, a Festival Theatre is rising, to be opened next year. This is 'straight' drama's parallel venture to the famous

Glyndebourne Opera, thirty miles to the east, which was also the fruit of a single man's faith and determination. Glyndebourne is now packed out from end to end of its summer-long season. This year, the newly erected bust of John Christie looked down upon us as we assembled for a *première*; for to the staple fare of superbly performed Mozart, Verdi and Rossini was added Henze's new opera to Auden and Kallman's libretto, *Elegy for Young Lovers*. This was not an easy pill to swallow at one gulp, but will clearly repay knowing better. The music is in the modern German idiom that finishes hardly anything it begins: but it begins many things of striking beauty.

So Chichester has an encouraging precedent in its own county: and another, to which it is enormously indebted, across the Atlantic. Stratford, Ontario, a small town like Chichester, was persuaded by a single man, Tom Patterson, to the gigantic gamble of a Shakespeare Festival Theatre; and because it aimed firmly at the highest standard and got Sir Tyrone Guthrie to lead it, one of the great theatres of the world was created. Again at Chichester, one man, Leslie Evershed-Martin, has followed the light: again Guthrie's advice has been sought: again the City Council has weighed in with the gift of an excellent site in the Park. Even the building is a slightly smaller replica of the Stratford model. High standards are assured by the appointment of Sir Laurence Olivier as Director of Productions, and he will announce before long a repertory of three plays for 1962.

I end this look round the English Theatre with its most brilliant revue for many years, *Beyond the Fringe*. It is created and performed by the same four young men, Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore. The last-named is a musician of great talent: his variations on *Colonel Bogey*, leading to one of those ever-regurgitated pianistic climaxes, are excruciatingly funny. But then, so is almost everything in the show. Its aim is deadly but never beastly; it is civilized and adult. Particularly welcome is the large amount of political satire. When I saw it, Peter Cook was making the Prime Minister's speech from the golf-course at Gleneagles in a devastatingly accurate manner, accompanying his every geographical reference with inaccurate digs at a globe set up beside him. For good balance, Alan Bennett showed Frank Cousins, the unilateralist labor leader, "Frankly Speaking" on TV. There are also an interview with a colored politician, a Tory MP speaking to his constituents on Angola, an all too truly foolish sermon, a skit on the Benjamin Britten-Peter Pears duo, and a telling dig at "the Beaver (brook)." Particularly when the company get together, we see beneath the surface to the deep feeling on matters such as the Death Penalty or "how soon will the Government get public services going again after Armageddon?"

It is appropriate to end with this show, both because it is so good and because it is so English (one item is titled "Real Class"). The barbs are sharp, but health-giving because they are aimed in love. For his entertainment and for the good of England and the world, every Englishman ought to see it. As it bids fair to run for several years, quite a few of them will.

The Relevance of Shakespeare

The American Shakespeare Festival
Stratford, Connecticut, 1961

by MAX BLUESTONE

"The purpose of playing," Hamlet declares, instructing players who are supposed to know, "both at first and now, was and is to hold . . . the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." Playing therefore has two functions: it creates moral stimuli, and because it does, it promulgates relevance in every age. In Hamlet's words we may hear the playwright's own voice implying that the greatest relevance of his work is its enduring capacity for moral excitation.

The American Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Connecticut, has an anxiously different idea of Shakespeare's relevance. Although the ASF Artistic Director has expressed his belief that "a Shakespeare Festival is not a museum where plays are held in reverence behind glass" and that "Shakespeare has a relationship to today," ASF versions of Shakespeare suggest that it finds problems where Hamlet did not. He felt no burden of reverential responsibility for a glass-enclosed classic. And he had no trouble understanding the relevance of moral stimuli. ASF seems burdened and troubled both, but it need not be. It can dispose of the first problem by accepting Hamlet's idea of the second. Shakespeare's audience of four centuries, enacting Ben Jonson's perception that Shakespeare is "not of an age, but for all time," demonstrates that nothing morally stimulating can remain a mere museum piece. Instead of exploiting Hamlet's high purpose, however, ASF chooses to show that the plays are very much of this time and that they can be familiarized out of their putative alien nature largely by means of novel settings and domesticating dramaturgy. Its 1961 repertoire places *As You Like It* on a twentieth-century Long Island estate out of F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Troilus and Cressida* on an American Civil War battlefield, and *Macbeth* in a Scotland of "a more recent century."

Shakespeare himself offers sufficient warrant for daring anachronism. To cavil with ASF's settings because they divert attention from museum pieces is to miss the point. The point is that ASF misplaces its emphasis. To hold the mirror up to nature, to image virtue and scorn, requires the daring, the imagination, and the enterprise that ASF pours into the narrowest kind of formal timeliness. Instead of Shakespearean artistry relevantly enduring because it can stimulate an audience morally, ASF gluts its audience with smugly self-comforting theatre *Kultur* rendered palatable, like Mother's cooking, because it is so familiar. But the imaging of scorn and virtue cannot be so readily familiarized or so easily swallowed as ASF assumes. If "we know what we are, we know not what we may be," and the Shakespearean revelation of the reaches of human nature cannot without violence to Shakespeare become easy, comfortable, homely.

ASF performances of Shakespeare pursue the relevance of familiarity

through an aggressive theatricality expressed in sets, music, lighting, costumes, props, and stage business. For a certain kind of theatricality there is again plenty of warrant in Shakespeare. It is the kind expressed in all those stage conventions raised to transcendent import by Shakespeare. Soliloquy, the unlocalized stage, the scenery and transits of time in the language, the blank verse itself — these and other conventions respond to the unique medium of the Elizabethan theatre for which Shakespeare wrote his plays: a bare platform traversed by the miming figure of an actor speaking a language necessarily heightened by the limitations of the stage. These conventions create a theatricality that balances degrees of audience involvement and alienation required by what Stanislavsky called the "superobjective" of any one play. When Hamlet wants "The Mousetrap" to strike Claudius the "guilty creature" to the soul, he urges the players to beget a "temperance that may give it [passion] smoothness." He is quite insistent: "Now this [playing] overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve . . ." The thing he fears most, ASF cultivates most energetically. It does not permit the superobjective of the play to subsume all the ingredients of a performance. Its theatrical intemperance shatters not only the museum glass but Hamlet's mirror also. Its superproductions become in effect performances about performances, and they turn moral stimuli into moral soporifics. Scorn and virtue become ciphers under ASF's pervasive insistence that all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. In Shakespeare, be it noted, the theatrical trope comes from a melancholy Jaques, a tragically isolated Macbeth, and the troubled brain of a tired Prospero. Each is a special case in no way admitting a generalization.

Shakespearean scorn and virtue may be problematical but not without meaning. The mirror reveals meaning, because Shakespeare's characteristic mode of thought and feeling operates through an ambience of contrasts and correspondences that imply the relationships between things. It yokes disparate categories of experience and mixes the elements in men, to either comic or tragic consequences. It rarely dissipates those distinctions that arouse the moral and satisfy the mimetic sensibilities. ASF renders null Hamlet's polarized scorn and virtue. It turns the Shakespearean world into a theatrical arena where it can display its inventive skill for conducting pure entertainment unencumbered by meaningful relationships. Emphasizing the theatrical, ASF obliterates those distinctions of good and bad, of yea and nay, which define "nature" for Hamlet and which make Shakespearean men the common progeny of mankind.

When ASF plays a Shakespeare who "has a relationship to today," it unwittingly responds to a timeliness possibly obscured when the hurly-burly of practical theatre is done. This is an age of alloy. The public prints can picture starving Asian children on one glossy page and sevenlayer technicolor cakes premixed and practically predigested on the next. Such assaults on our capacity to make crucial distinctions help to shape our world view. Peace is war and war is peace and accidents are tragedies. When the theatre obliterates distinctions, tragedy becomes melodrama, high comedy becomes divertissement, and great dramatic art becomes mere entertainment. There is no purpose, in Hamlet's sense, to the playing at Stratford, Connecticut.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* insists on distinctions. It carefully structures

its images of scorn and virtue in a series of encounters between characters embodying various conventional ideas that clash with each other and against Rosalind's unconventional and realistically therapeutic astringency. Her *claritas* illuminates and modifies every conventional and inappropriate idea in the play. Nothing must blur Rosalind's catalytic status in the action. Intemperately impressed by the convention theme of the play, ASF fixed on a clever dramaturgical device for mounting an equivalent of the theme. It paraded a series of clichés across the stage and reduced everything and everyone, including Rosalind, to fit its "interpretive" pattern. Rosalind became a young debutante in a gallery of stereotypes; Orlando a hayseed in blue denim and incapable of speaking his lines without a rustic grin; Oliver an aristocratic bully in jodhpurs and boots coolly snapping out a Ronson lighter for Charles the Wrestler's cigar; Duke Frederick a pompously comic villain who stamps through the garden of his estate in frustration when Celia runs away; Le Beau a Continental gigolo who at the end of the play pairs off with an ASF-invented mistress of Duke Frederick's; Duke Senior a patriarchal yachtsman whose co-mates in exile become a gang of merry college boys fleeing the time away carelessly in sweaters and sports clothes; Adam a bewhiskered and toothless Gabby Hayes who knocks himself to the ground in comic feebleness; Oliver Martext a village curate in flying coattails who beeps his way through Arden on an English bicycle; Audrey a gum-chewing sharecropper from Tobacco Road; and Jaques a black-garbed West Coast cultist in sandals and goatee. These surprising characters wade through a rich confectioner's cream of theatrical business: Celia arrives in Arden loaded down with tennis rackets, birdcages, hatboxes, and other comic luggage; Touchstone surveys the Forest through a toy telescope; Duke Senior receives the report of Jaques' lament over the stricken deer while he polishes his spectacles on a follower's neckcloth; when he praises the sweet uses of adversity, he does calisthenics; when he speaks of the jewel in the head of the toad, he reaches into an imaginary stream at the edge of the stage where his men paddle in the water and tickle the trout; when the marriages are arranged at the end not the god Hymen but a tintype photographer presides as he poses the couples in a cliché of the family portrait and explodes his flash powder over an ancient box camera covered with black cloth; Rosalind speaks the epilogue from the arms of Orlando, by now an impatient bridegroom attempting to cart her off to the nuptial bed. Everyone has a fine time executing these dramaturgical whirligigs, but the play — "the play's the thing" — is forgotten. Jacques becomes the hero, and Duke Senior's men lift him to their shoulders in athletic triumph. Centered in the limelight when he speaks the Seven Ages of Man speech, he points to Adam as its exemplar! Rosalind's critique of Jaques loses its edge: "I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad: and to travel for it too." In Shakespeare's play she triumphs over him, but in ASF's she fishes in a silken property pond as she speaks, and her words become the idle jabber of a silly girl. When she astutely instructs Orlando in the relativity of time, they toss a rubber ball gaily back and forth across a silken property stream. Thus encumbered by business, Rosalind's normative status becomes incredible. Who can believe that "men have died from time to time . . . but not for love"? Shakespeare's fine distinctions disappear, and the ASF version implies that there is no life but Jaques', no woman like Rosa-

lind, no need for any young thing to "thank heaven fasting for a good man's love." The cerebral content of the high comedy succumbs to the exuberance of sheer theatricality. It is all very entertaining, but it is not Shakespeare.

In ASF's *Macbeth* dense clouds of ground fog cover the heath; drums, bagpipes, torches, and an acrobatic attack on Dunsinane fill the stage; a gorgeous backdrop of cowhides being rigged into position on the upperstage supplants in the attention of the audience Banquo's description of the temple-haunting martlets; a full-length red drapery (derived from the last Old Vic version) enmeshes Macbeth as he drives away a bewowled, bloodspattered ghost — all this eye-and-ear-filling staginess splits the senses of the groundlings and contributes to the reduction of the play from tragedy to melodrama. The hero becomes a being perfectly credible, perfectly understandable, and perfectly transparent. There are no troubling cosmic questions: "Did heaven look on/And would not take their part?"

To play the mystery of Shakespeare's Macbeth, the milk of human kindness mixed with the butchery, requires a perception of distinctions ASF seems unwilling to trouble its audience with. For whatever reasons of the star system, the Artistic Director confessed in a pre-season statement that his leading players were "doing something quite different in *Macbeth*, something that is their own interpretation based on their personalities and styles. We don't try to mold but rather to use their individuality, yet without violating the play." This noble liberalism proved disastrous. Macbeth became a diluted J.B. worried by a lawn running to crabgrass and a golf score too high over par, a henpecked Scottish Babbitt. He uncomfortably handles a spear as if he were supervising a backyard barbecue. He invites Fate into the lists as if he were issuing an invitation to bridge. When he gestures the scorpions in his mind, he clutches his gastronomic region. When he fears he has given his soul to Satan ("the common enemy of man"), he points to the heavens! In the plain error of that gesture lies the measure of the difference between Shakespeare's Macbeth and ASF's. While the director was planning how to install his cowhide backdrop, Macbeth shrank to a "dwarfish thief" in borrowed robes.

The misconstruction of the role affected the playing of the other parts as well. To Macbeth's hesitating "If we fail," Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth replies, "We fail?/But screw your courage to the sticking place,/And we'll not fail." She sees in him, the "brave Macbeth" who can bathe in reeking wounds on the battlefield, a Shakespearean hero who dares do all and more that may become a man. Such a hero knows what it means to him to enforce his will on the future, even if he does not know the outcome. He must act, anyway. Therein lies part of his mystery and his grandeur. In Connecticut, however, there is no understanding of such heroism. In modern tragedy, as in *J.B.* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the two plays in which the leading ASF players achieved great success, heroism depends on accepting the significance of meaninglessness. Fatalistically accepting the possibility of failure, the ASF Lady Macbeth changed the incredulous intonation of "We fail?" to the blank assent of "We fail." The change shatters that Shakespearean conception of the tragic experience which seems to set horses to eating each other, to incarnadine the seas, and to convulse a whole order of nature. Such tragic depths and heights, however, ASF eschews for the relevance of comfortable familiarity.

Macbeth becomes an anguished middleclass muddler incapable of suffering such transvaluation as occurs mysteriously and awesomely in Shakespeare's swelling act of imperial themes. The ASF audience can make its comfortable peace with scorn and virtue both. It has heard only a pathetic tale full of sound and fury signifying a profound disbelief in Shakespearean tragedy. It has been entertained, but not by Shakespeare.

Out of the unresolved contradictions of Shakespeare's never clapper-clawed comical satyre, *Troilus and Cressida*, ASF plucked a reductive relevance for the age and body of our time. For an audience that had just been told to stock its bombshelters with canned goods and portable radios, ASF turned the play into a *Götterdämmerung*: the levelling of all value before the ravages of a hostile god of Time. ASF consecrated the performance to that "blind oblivion," that "formless ruin of oblivion" Cressida and Agamemnon speak of. It is Ulysses' homily also: "Time hath . . . a wallet at his back, / Wherein he puts alms for oblivion . . ."

Troy is a colonnaded Southern mansion under the leadership of a Robert E. Lee-Priam, king of the Confederate-Trojans. The Union-Greeks, led by a U.S. Grant-Agamemnon chewing a cigar and dressed in the Northern general's linen dustcoat, conduct their policy deliberations before a chuckwagon camouflaged under a leafy canopy. On one side of the wagon a silent Diomedes ominously shaves himself. On the other, Thersites, a camp victualler in galluses and flaming red shirt hoots and yawns and spits into a brass spittoon he sets at Agamemnon's feet. Into the Greek camp comes Aeneas preceded by a dirty white truce flag to deliver Hector's challenge. "Fools on both sides," in Troilus' phrase, face each other. Later the Trojans and their Greek hosts stagger drunkenly across the stage while Thersites condemns them all. In the betrayal scene before Calchas' tent, Cressida, no longer the parasol-twirling Southern belle of the opening scenes, plays the tortured victim of oblivion, her mind incipiently "turned whore," as Thersites says. Diomedes punctuates the betrayal by slapping the palm of his hand with Troilus' sleeve in an erotic gesture of flagellation out of Kraft-Ebing.

In the faithless and oblivion-bound world implied by these episodes, Hector's "I must not break my faith" seems merely fatuous. When the issues disappear in holocaustic irresolution at the end, ASF takes Achilles' vaunt, "Look, Hector, how thy sun begins to set" not only for a literal suggestion about staging the last scenes but for a metaphorical gloss on the death of civilization. Cannons roar and wheel across the battlefield, rifles crackle, Rebels yell, armies in blue and gray surge over the stage. Rushing out of a trench and up stage center, Thersites is shot spectacularly in the back after his encounter with Margarelon. Myrmidons silhouetted against a blood-red sky surround and bayonet the unarmed Hector. The breakaway Southern mansion of Troy falls into ruins. Troilus crawls wounded along the ground, and in an invented entrance Hecuba takes up the lines, "There is no more to say." As twilight sets in, Pandarus crosses before the ruined colonnade carrying two carpet bags (a piece of business borrowed from the Guthrie version set in World War I); he pauses to set down his luggage and emptily promises "some two months hence my will shall here be made." Powerfully backed by nuclear madness in the form and pressure of the time and requiring only a few distortions of its text, *Troilus and Cressida* thus becomes a modern prob-

lem play. ASF familiarly makes meaninglessness significant. It succeeds best, ironically enough, with the least Shakespearean play in the canon.

ASF now numbers its audience in the hundreds of thousands. It has overcome many of its inaugural difficulties. It has persuaded a group of devoted sponsors to support its activities. It has acquired a semi-permanent acting company. Its academy trains Shakespearean actors. Its Spring school program introduces thousands of children to Shakespeare. It has given a fine theatre a local habitation and a name. For all these reasons, it aspires to becoming the national Shakespeare company. It therefore has enormous responsibilities. Because the theatre depends on an intimate relation between players and audience, the ASF audience shares some of the responsibility. When it accepts Shakespeare in ASF versions and makes no protest, it shares part of the responsibility. The audience, if it is worthy, deserves to see the purpose of playing fulfilled so that scorn and virtue may be mirrored in all their Shakespearean fulness and complexity. Like Hamlet's "judicious," it must learn to grieve over ASF's Shakespeare-turned-entertainer. If it continues unskilfully to laugh, it will continue to elicit a Shakespeare whose essential vesture is torn to tatters as he is released from his glass cabinet in ASF's museum of curiosities.

The audience will have to be satisfied with isolated individual performances by actors who manage to survive the burdens of ASF showmanship. Paul Sparer as Corin, Lennox, and Ulysses (the best performance of the season); Hiram Sherman as Touchstone, the Porter, and Pandarus; James Ray as Malcolm, Oliver, and Diomedes; and Carrie Nye as Cressida and Lady Macduff — these beget a temperance and an intelligent appropriateness even Hamlet could applaud. They understood, as the ASF producers and directors do not, that the play's the thing by which to catch the conscience of the audience.

The Stratford, Ontario, Shakespeare Festival, 1961

by L. CUMMINGS

It is not to be expected that a Shakespearean play be presented as a museum piece. Since we do not know how the King's Men delivered a line or a scene, though we may be able to eliminate certain possibilities, we ought not object to a wide latitude of presentations if they seem plausible. Modern interpretations which are eccentric from acting traditions or contrary to received concepts are therefore rather to be welcomed than censured, for they can suggest new possibilities.

However, there are certain rules to the Shakespearean game. The first rule in the book is that the text performed be as near what Shakespeare wrote, or, perhaps, what his company delivered. This means that the work of the textual critic must be utilized. The Stratford (Ontario) Shakespeare Festival, for one, has adopted, if not one of the best, one of several possible satisfactory texts — G. B. Harrison's Penguin editions. But the next rule states that this reliable text must then be presented unimproved, or with minimal cuts if the cast or stage forbid complete performance. In their ignorance or presumption, most performers hack their way through with a bloody axe. At Stratford, though there was considerable cutting and a little botching, which is touched on below, there seemed to be an honest attempt to present as much Shakespeare as could fit in two and a half or three hours' space.

But the next rule is that any unavoidable cutting of the reliable text must not be an excuse to remove inconvenient matters which do not fit a neat or unusual interpretation of a play or character. The Stratford Festival players presented a version of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* by director George McCowan. This is the story of how bully England shook off monkish ignorance and the yoke of Rome. Cardinal Wolsey, who wears a train ten foot long, is subverting the kingdom by bungling Henry's divorce plans. Cranmer gets the job done for Henry, and Wolsey is sacked. The cardinal's ironic good wishes to Thomas More, his successor and the Catholic martyr, are omitted. Cranmer's expediting the divorce is fortunately described in the program furnished each auditor as he entered the playhouse since this action isn't in the play. This document also solemnly tells all that Roman Catholicism was "the official religion in England at this time." Queen Katharine begins to see through the sham also, witness her impatient and careless sign of the cross in her last scene. The next churchman is Gardiner, one of Wolsey's former protégés. By his Scots accent and sober brown costume he seems a member of the Kirk. Finally, a saintly archbishop named Cranmer wins out. He also dresses modestly without a train and recognizes that the proper place of an archbishop is kneeling before his monarch. A right Protestant version. And it packed them in, having the best box office of all in predominately Protestant Ontario.

Yet with this rendering of Shakespeare's play, lines were spoken, spaced, and paced with a rare understanding and ingenuity under Mr. McCowan's direction. The play progressed rapidly but with only a few signs of haste. The dream-masque of Queen Katharine was omitted to speed things and perhaps to prevent too much dwelling on Henry's brutality, and Queen Anne's

coronation was trimmed by the brilliant and amusing device of having the two citizens look through the audience as they relate the procession; however, considerable tampering with the text was needed for this admittedly good piece of theatre. Mr. McCowan may have lacked reverence, but he succeeded in presenting a plausible version of the original. But not the original.

Douglas Campbell played King Henry excellently as a bluff, direct, cynical, hard chairman of the board lacking only a Corona Corona. Some scenes and reactions were tipped awry to make him into an Absolute Tudor Monarch. But such an interpretation is honest within the limits of what Shakespeare actually wrote. His speech in justification of Wolsey after the divorce trial's suspension (II.iv.155 ff.) was punctuated by the boss's raising his voice over the murmur of the clerks and lords in the court and cowing all into silence. An angry "I will be bold with time and your attention" causes all to grow mum, but a few lines further along, his "... give heed to't" is bellowed at Wolsey and Gardiner who are beginning to whisper. Shades of Pozzo's "Is everybody looking at me?", but interesting and legitimate, and consistent with Campbell's whole depiction of the role.

In the final scene, the stage was crowded by all who could come, all dressed in white with heavy gold brocade; the usually carefully marshalled lights were turned up full to dazzle with all the finery so that the scene became weighted with the spectacle. I suspect that this was an attempt to strengthen what was thought a weak scene with its prophetic panegyric of Elizabeth. Mention of James was omitted probably to spare us more tedium; and it's snigger to have the praise limited to the namesake of the reigning monarch, dim as the similarity otherwise is. Perhaps one ought not to object to use of the modern resources of the stage, but can't a company expect that people who come to see Shakespeare do not need him enriched or tuck pointed?

Rule four, intimated above, is that a Shakespearean play should be played as it was written in spirit. Players and directors ought not to strive to find the same kind of unity and coherence as is found in Ibsen or Shaw, especially in plays based on historical sources. Also, while an opposition, preferably a duality of forces, makes a play easier to present to an intellectually besotted audience, if such a simple conflict is not in the play as Shakespeare wrote it, it is not there. Such a simplification is thought to make for unity as well as clarity, and is obviously a sore temptation. Stratford's *Henry VIII* was the sin in its mortal form, *Coriolanus* in its venial.

The costuming of *Coriolanus* in the Revolutionary and early Napoleonic mode was usually not an interference. I admit that I was startled to see Coriolanus assassinated by the popping off of muskets and thought immediately of Huey Long, Garfield, and other similarly unfortunate men. But I was amused to find the Tribunes costumed and made up to resemble John and Sam Adams. English Canada, of course, was first settled in numbers by American Tories. Perhaps the well-nigh universal desire to find clear themes and easy dualities in Shakespeare's plays caused director Michael Langham to attempt to evoke strong sympathy with the patricians and to cast the Adamses as the villains of the piece. Though faced with this imposed need to be waspish and curmudgeons, Bernard Behrens and Bruno Gerussi gave sharply realized if a little too similar interpretations. The rabblement, especially Max Helpmann, is to be commended. There was clear differentiation in the various

citizens and the difficult crowd scenes went well though the ritualized battles were less satisfactory. Eleanor Stuart played Volumnia dressed as Mother Whistler but imparted dignity to the role and escaped ranting, so she was credible. I regret to say that Paul Scofield, come from the English Stratford players to star before his Canadian cousins, was not always satisfactory as Coriolanus. His interpretation, perhaps influenced by the unhappy theory of opposed and simple forces in Shakespeare which somewhat distorted the play, was monochromatic. Though his stature and form are heroic, when immobile his feet were always spread, the thorax jutted, the shoulders squared, the head held high. I could not lose the suspicion that Mr. Scofield was searching for someone in the balcony seats, so doggedly did he return to glowering perusals of those precincts, even when Coriolanus was speaking of matters of moment. His voice, a rich baritone, was not supple — the only range available seeming to be in volume — and sometimes Coriolanus grew positively stuffy and oratorical in the worst sense, which he is not in the play. Nor did I find the steadfast tin soldier in the text.

The excellent Douglas Campbell played Menenius excellently. His good humor, his wit, his practicality, his tinge of pomposity — a mixture of Polonius and Chaucer's Pandarus — established a tone which saved most of the play from failure. In fact, the very sameness of the Coriolanus acted as a foil to this active, full rendition, so that Mr. Campbell emerged as the dominant figure. At this place, I must mention again the fine depiction of the Tribunes, especially by Mr. Gerussi. For the play, which moved along quickly without haste, was led by them and Menenius. If the title role in the play is not excellent, Menenius and the Tribunes can carry the early portions and some of the rest, but Aufidius must aid, increasingly toward the last. By good fortune, Mr. John Colicos gave a sensitive and thoughtful presentation of the part. Occasionally, he was too precipitant, almost as if he did not wish to be overshadowing another. But Aufidius became a beautiful athlete, twisted with envy, but capable of resuming his proper form as his rage leaves him.

All this suggests to me that it was unnecessary to import English stars when such very capable actors as Campbell, Rain, Gerussi, Colicos, Creley, Reid, Galloway, Fitzgerald, and others are available.

The fifth rule of the game is to read the verse. In all the plays, the lines whether blank verse, rimed couplets, or prose, were given a colloquial delivery; it was as if there was an agreement in the company to conceal the medium in which the dramas were written, and so he who was best able to give the illusion that he was speaking Shaw or Miller did best. Even the high number of rimed couplets in *Love's Labour's Lost* did not prevent the illusion of everyday speech. However, the comedy was the best performed of the three Shakespeare plays. Mr. Langham kept the joyous pastoralism (and the gentle mockery of pastoralism) unwithered. I do not believe the tone was ever less than sure. Finally, the appearance of Mercade with his sober message in the midst of riotous fun shocked and chilled and the jolly rhythm of the play was gone, the youthfulness had become older, and love and joy were progrogued. "Worthies, away! The scene begins to cloud." Mr. Langham's thoughtful and tasteful direction was aided very much by apt costuming. The disposition and movement of figures on the stage was here the best of all the performances because it never called attention to itself and was never overtly

symbolic as occasionally in *Henry VIII* and *Coriolanus*.

Mr. Colico's Berowne was lively, virile, and youthful. Zoe Caldwell's vigorous Rosaline was sometimes pressing and desperate and lacked the sparkle and charm of an intelligent girl. Douglas Rain, who was most pleasing as Wolsey, rendered gossip Boyet very well also. In a lugubrious monotone, Mr. Scofield's Don Adriano de Armado wavered deliciously between stateliness and pomposity, taking a line between a scheming gigolo with the gout and a pathetic, foolish old gentleman. But the beautiful youngster who played Moth was not always understandable, so that much of the sense of the Spaniard's remarks in their dialogues was lost. Jack Creley as Holofernes had seen live professors in front of classes and transposed the university lecturer to the King of Navarre's park with hilarious results. While William Needles did not permit his curate to do more than support the pedant, his good-humored, fleshly, impoverished sycophant could not be done better.

I have no space to comment on the suitabilities of the Stratford stage and house for presentation of Shakespeare, but two words on the handicaps. The prominence of the upper stage and its stairways almost obliges the director to use it whether the play calls for it or not; else he wastes space. Also, actors all too frequently are required to lounge on the steps circumscribing the plateau in order to allow spectators in the front orchestra seats to see the main business.

The Canvas Barricade, a contest-winning play by the Canadian Donald Lamont Jack, found the bare apron stage a little awkward. Occasionally the acting was slipshod, though largely performed by the Shakespearean players. I must single out Peter Donat for special applause. Not naturalistic, the action was fairly tight except for a tedious square dance, a contrived TV satire, and an amusing man-on-the-street interview. The point of the play is blunted by pensioning off the unrecognized and socially rejected painter into a Never-never Land of \$10,000 a year and complete independence. Mr. Jack's characters are half-hour television types, and one is not surprised to find that writing TV plays is how he earns his bread. But much of the diction shows a command of apt language and a musicality, and the thought is based on fresh observation of life and a suggestion of vision. Perhaps Mr. Jack is more an embryonic but highly talented poet and essayist than a writer of full-length plays.

In the limits of a review, there is scarce space to suggest improvements, so that I may sound jaundiced. I do not wish to imply that the Stratford Festival is not worth the trip. The acting is usually very good if naturalistic, the direction and mounting evidence taste and intelligence if sometimes a desire to violate the Shakespearean game, and the playhouse sumptuous. Considering the state of Shakespearean performances in North America, I would not hesitate to call the Stratford Festival very good.

Book Reviews

David E. Jones. *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*. University of Toronto Press, 1960. 242 pp., \$4.00.

Looking back over the four plays Mr. Eliot has written since *Murder in the Cathedral* and trying to measure their effect on the public, the thing of which one is most aware is uneasiness. This has several causes. One of them is the author's deliberate intention: he is quoted as saying in an interview after the appearance of *The Cocktail Party*, "I should not like anyone seeing a play of mine to feel completely comfortable." He intends to disconcert us, by showing people like ourselves in the process of losing their illusions about themselves and unable to find their true identity. He intends to convict us of lacking the love that recognizes the true identity of another person and accepts him for himself. He intends to show us, as we laugh at Edward and Lavinia at the moment of their exposure to each other, how absurd *we* are: or as we see Claverton fighting it out with his scapegrace son, how ineffective is our communication even with those nearest to us. None of the Existentialists have been able to make us identify ourselves with their characters so fully as has Mr. Eliot. This kind of uneasiness, then, is intended and on the whole salutary.

But the word 'salutary' raises another question. Is it the author's business to impose such an experience? It used to be, of course: but since religion and morals are confined in watertight compartments and relegated by society to limited spheres of influence, the writer who assumes that they have universal application causes us grave uneasiness. This derives, not from our individual attitude in regard to them, but from the fear lest we should have to accept religion as being an integral part of human life, and recognize standards set by someone above us: lest we must realize, too, that 'no man liveth to himself' but as a piece in the pattern of an integrated society.

We fear these imperatives partly because we do not know them: and our uneasiness with the Eliot plays arises also from the maladjustments created by the gap between the truth he sees and the society which he is depicting and in which we live. There is an embarrassment in stating the truth. One is conscious of it in the pious rejoinders to Reilly in the last few minutes of *The Cocktail Party*, the clichés of Eggerson in *The Confidential Clerk*, the moralizing of Claverton in the last act of *The Elder Statesman* and the awkwardness of some of the love-passages. Here the author is afflicted by the malaise of his audience. It is much easier to find words for the ironic comment or the critical appraisal than for the positive truths which one knows one's audience will shy away from.

Similarly, there is an unfamiliarity about moral judgements. We are accustomed in our theatre to judgement based on the desires, or the supposed needs, of the individual; on social convention, on political expediency, on emotional impulse. We are quite out of practice with an absolute moral

standard; and as for its deriving from religious faith, this occurs only in sentimental film melodrama or biblical spectacle. A serious assumption of such standards and of such a faith is disturbing to us.

An author disturbs us, too, who draws upon a knowledge and a tradition that we do not share. We feel that, behind the surface of Mr. Eliot's contemporary world, there lies a past which to us is a book of reference but to him is alive in his contemporary characters. When we discover that Greek dramas have been the starting point for his modern creations and that the thoughts of his people have their roots in Dante or the Bhagavad-Gita, we are taken aback. The civilization which we thought we were leaving behind as we advanced into the scientific age has caught up with us.

Our maladjustment here is reflected in the technical problems of the plays. Mr. Eliot is a poet who has worked hard to learn the craft of the theatre, and in doing so has sacrificed his poetic grandeur to meet us where we are. It is not that he believes us incapable of poetry, but that he believes it is not natural to us. He wants first of all to be able to talk with us on equal, relaxed terms: then we may find our way together to conversation at deeper levels. This may, of course, be a misapprehension: and in any case the bourgeois society of the last-generation Shaftesbury Avenue play, which fills Mr. Eliot's stage, has largely ceased to be the bearer of ideas in today's theatre, so that we ourselves are not talking quite the same language he has learned for our sakes. But in developing his dramatic style, he has brought us face to face with our own difficulties in communication, which reflect our difficulties in identifying with our fellow-men: and we realize that only as we grow in that kind of grace can we, as in one of his essays he makes us say, "talk in poetry too."

As with language, so with the dramatic conventions, and especially with symbols, there are problems. Mr. Eliot has an unrivalled acquaintance with, and critical understanding of, the dramatic traditions of the past. He starts from a Greek play: but his creation is no mere reconstruction with a contemporary comment. In fact, by the time he has finished with it, the source is concealed from all but critical scholars and we have a new creation in terms of an entirely different philosophy and an equally different dramatic form. The naturalistic form itself undergoes revision, being modified by the verse-pattern used for the dialogue and by the symbolic pattern that underlies the surface action. Thus a sense of uncertainty is created in the playgoer: are we listening to verse or prose? are we to take the action 'straight' or look for hidden meanings? are these characters merely people like ourselves or archetypes from the store of dramatic history? This kind of reaction is symptomatic of our inability to take a work of art as it comes to us, which again derives from our lack of faith: there is no common denominator between the artist and ourselves.

But why, if we suffer such uneasiness in their presence, do we not leave these plays on the shelf? We can accept *Murder in the Cathedral* as a great work. It is a special case, written for a special occasion and for an audience which could be relied upon to share its author's premises; so he was able to write in the full power of his special gifts and express the full range of his special convictions. But why can we not say 'he has never done it again' and let the rest go?

We cannot in fact do this. Mr. Eliot is too great and too compelling a writer to allow us to make this kind of escape from him, however much we want to. We have to try to understand him: and this is where Mr. Jones comes in.

The Plays of T. S. Eliot is not a critical appraisal, but an 'exploration'. Mr. Jones has done a great service, not only to scholars but to all those who feel the obligation to come to terms with Mr. Eliot's drama. Most of all, perhaps, to those in the theatre: for these plays must and will go on being produced, and their effect on the stage depends to a very large extent on the understanding which their actors, and most of all their directors, have of the author's mind. This is not the kind of drama which a director can use as a blueprint for his own building; it does not offer much in the way of visual opportunities, but it can have an intense theatrical excitement if the director and actors penetrate into the layers beneath the surface of the characters' experience. They are in fact both archetypes and contemporary people: and the discovery which can be made for and with the audience on these different levels can bring rich rewards.

The explorer could have no better guide than Mr. Jones. He treats the dramatist's work as a single whole, not allowing *Murder in the Cathedral*, which he recognizes as unquestionably a great work, to be separated from what follows it, but tracing the development of the author both in terms of theme and of craft, so that we get a unified picture. Each of the plays is treated with equal care and understanding. The whole question of Mr. Eliot's relationship to the Greek drama is fully studied in examining each play: we see how Greek in form is *Murder in the Cathedral*, and then how in the plays of contemporary life the Greek play which is used as a starting-point becomes transformed by the Christian philosophy of the author into a new thing, both in form and content. No one has before worked this out with the thoroughness and consistency shown by Mr. Jones. He traces also the growth and change of the main themes in Mr. Eliot's thought from play to play, and the changes in stage technique as he comes into the commercial theatre.

The book begins with a chapter on Poetry in the Theatre, directed to setting Mr. Eliot's own thought on the subject in a context appropriate to it. Mr. Jones' analysis of the nature of poetry and its place in the creation of drama would certainly command Mr. Eliot's sympathy, as his account of the historical background provides the right introduction to the next chapter, "Eliot's Approach to Drama." This deals with the fragments which make up *Sweeney Agonistes* and with *The Rock*, a pageant play for which Mr. Eliot 'wrote the words' and from which he has preserved only the Choruses. There follows a chapter on each of the five full-length plays which complete Mr. Eliot's dramatic output to date.

Mr. Jones' method with each play is to build up his picture of it from careful study of the text, reinforced by relevant material from Mr. Eliot's own critical writing (to which he acknowledges a very large debt throughout the book), from the comments of others who were connected with the production of the plays and of some of the critics who have already dealt with them. The result is a patchwork, but of clear design; every piece is fitted into Mr. Jones' own pattern of exposition, supplying the contribution it is chosen

to make, and the whole, unlike many books which are filled with quotations, is easy and pleasant to read.

The exposition of each play benefits greatly, not only from the thorough study of the Greek sources to determine what in them are the elements of Mr. Eliot's inspiration, but also from Mr. Jones' firm grasp of Christian theology. No one can write adequately about Mr. Eliot who does not possess this: but theological argument about the plays may lead to misconstruction of the author's thinking. Mr. Jones eschews argument: he has assimilated the concepts which have governed Mr. Eliot's mind since he started to write plays, and also traced with accurate care the shift in emphasis which has occurred during that period. At first, the center of the stage is held by the elect soul (Becket, Harry Monchensey) whose self-sacrifice fertilizes the spiritual soil for the rest of humanity. After the saint (Becket) comes the elect at the moment of his election (Harry). Then the elect moves to the side of the stage (Celia) as the ordinary folk take the center in *The Cocktail Party*; and it is their salvation in terms of the apparent trivialities of everyday life, and in terms of the life of the family (*The Confidential Clerk*) which becomes more and more important. In the final play to date, *The Elder Statesman*, the recurring demand for love to be given to one's fellow-man, not in one's own image of him but as he really is, dominates the play. This is the progression which Mr. Jones unfolds for us.

Although it is not aimed at, there is inevitably some critical appraisal in the book. But Mr. Jones is in deep accord with the author he is writing about; he is blessedly free both from favoritism among the plays and from subservience to fashion. He clearly regards *Murder in the Cathedral* as the only one of the plays which can as yet be pronounced a masterpiece — "it may even be the greatest religious play ever written." Of the others "it is difficult . . . to be sure of their individual stature. One cannot yet distinguish between their intrinsic merit and their importance as steps towards the re-establishment of poetic drama." This is a wise restraint of judgement; and indeed the whole book has both a breadth of view and a nicety of judgement which reminds one at times of its subject.

Despite its sound scholarship, this is not in the narrow sense an academic book. Mr. Jones has explored the plays in the theatre as well as in the study. He has acted in and directed some of them; and his dealing with them makes it clear that he sees them on the stage and not on the page. This, as most scholars now recognize, is a vital element even for the scholarship of the drama; and it also makes the book of much value to would-be directors and actors of Mr. Eliot. Indeed, it is likely to remain an indispensable aid to all those who need to gain a clear understanding of this most disturbing yet most profoundly rewarding of modern poetic dramatists.

E. MARTIN BROWNE

The German Drama

- H. F. Garten. *Modern German Drama*. Essential Books, 1959.
272 pp., \$6.00
- Walter H. Sokel. *The Writer in Extremis. Expressionism in twentieth-century German literature*. Stanford University Press, 1959.
251 pp., \$5.00

In the preface, H. F. Garten says that his book is not intended as a comprehensive history of modern German drama or as a portrait gallery of individual playwrights but as a survey of all authors and plays that have contributed in one way or another to the main stream of modern German drama. Yet, it is difficult to imagine the audience which Garten had in mind. Surely, the scholar in the field of German literature has infinitely better and more thorough books available already. On the other hand, the English-reading public which might wish for a book on trends in the modern German drama will find instead an almost completely uncritical compendium of German plays written between 1889 and 1958 arranged in the conventional way under somewhat shopworn labels: Naturalism, Neo-Romanticism, Social Satire, Expressionism, New Realism, National Socialism, and Contemporary Drama. One gets into each compartment by opening a very lightly built introductory door. Garten touches upon the main trends, spiritual, social, and political of the period, and the ideas which he expresses are neither new nor startling. To give an example: an inherent instability in German drama is caused by the need that every generation, and indeed each individual playwright, feels to create the drama, as it were, anew because, unlike England and France, Germany does not contain an established society with accepted values and traditions. Thus, German theatrical history is characterized by alternation of equilibrium with eruption, and by decentralization, despite Berlin's centrifugal attraction.

The body of each chapter consists of an enumeration of plays, which are outlined in varying lengths from a few lines to a page. Mr. Garten includes a large number of authors and plays that have long been forgotten and should not be remembered in a book of this size. I doubt that many of my colleagues in the field of German literature would remember or care to remember Georg Hirschfeld, Herbert Eulenberg, A. W. Schmidtbonn, Wilhelm Speyer, Bernhard Blume, Max Mohr, Gerhart Menzel, E. W. Möller, Hans Chlumberg, Christa Winsloe, or for that matter the lesser works of some more important writers. It is impossible to summarize the plots of all notable modern German dramas in 250 pages and to attempt interpretations as well. Thus, we are treated to outlines of twenty-two plays by Kaiser in nineteen pages but are left merely with a bewildering mass of motifs and a few ideas. The occasional interpretations remain mere attempts. Hauptmann's *And Pippa Dances*, one of the most puzzling plays in modern literature, is disposed of in a few lines which never go below the surface. The symbolic ending of Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening* is merely described, with no attempt at interpretation made at all. Occasional snap judgments are unconvincing. Thus, Haupt-

mann's *Sunken Bell* is described as the play that has dated most quickly but it is also "an artist's drama, picturing the aspirations and mental conflicts of a creative artist in purely symbolic and poetic terms," which would indicate that it deals with a rather timeless subject.

Besides the general philosophy and layout of the book, there are smaller individual items which are unfortunate. The chapter on Brecht is especially unsatisfactory. Garten either misunderstands or wants to misunderstand Brecht when he says: "Evidently, the only genuine conviction Brecht held — and had held from the outset — was the conviction that the world is bad, and man is evil." To say that the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire deprived Hofmannsthal of the mainspring of his creative powers is to disregard the poet's Greek dramas and, above all, his comedies and *Der Turm*, all written after 1918. The chapter on Neo-Romanticism would profit by a mention of the rather obvious parallels to French symbolism. Is *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* really "a slight play"? Garten confides that he had close personal contacts in his day with Hauptmann and Kaiser but surely his treatment of these two great writers shows no deeper insight than that of other encyclopedists. Finally, the bibliography contains books but no articles at all, thus leaving out some very important research in favor of some rather mediocre books.

One of the startling developments of the post-war literary scene in Germany has been the great revival of interest in the period of expressionism which has given rise to new editions of expressionist writers, a veritable flood of books and articles on the period, anthologies, exhibitions, and the like. As death calls the last witnesses of this turbulent era from the scene, it will become both easier and more difficult to write a definitive history of German expressionism — a book which certainly does not exist today.

Mr. Sokel's book is a giant step in this direction. He has managed to free himself from all the conventional clichés which have been published on the subject, and the result is a fresh examination of the ideas which underlie this movement. In his opening chapter on "Pure Form and Formlessness" he traces the history of form in German literature from Kant, whose two most important contributions to the development of modern aesthetics were the clear distinction between aesthetic and logical ideas and the concept of organism. With three basic concepts — the sovereign freedom of genius to find and apply its own laws, the separation of aesthetic from logical ideas, and the absorption of content in organic form — German Idealism established the groundwork for the modernist structure. In demonstrating the incompatibility between human aspirations and human existence, Schopenhauer completed the process which Kant had begun. Since the only escape from the will as blind force is the abnegation or transformation of Will into Idea, it follows that this can best be done by music, the art in which ideas are identical with form. The adoption of principles of musical composition by the other arts is the single most important characteristic of all modernism. A brief discussion of the symbol in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature shows that it has gradually moved from something complete and meaningful in itself (an individual character or phenomenon linked with a universal idea) to the expression of the essence of a character by the sequence of musical notes or the leitmotiv in literature. In the expressionist drama a

person often becomes the literal embodiment of a leitmotiv, an aesthetic attribute in the disguise of a human shape, a function of the dramatic idea. The central character in Strindberg's *Road to Damascus* and all the dramas which followed in its wake is not a fixed individual personality but the crystallization of psychic forces. Similarly, expressionism not only destroys the three unities but changes time and space into a function of expression. All features of reality are distorted by exaggeration; even speech is no longer a means of characterization. Instead, monstrous fears may become envisioned realities.

In subsequent chapters Sokel deals with the expressionist writer as well as the man whom he pictures in his works and the hoped-for vision of a man who may emerge from the upheaval. Isolation from society and family, the compulsion to be an entertainer, the lack of stimulating contact between artist and reader, self-awareness, a chronic inability to win a woman's love, a conviction of one's own unworthiness linked with erotic failure — all these contribute to the martyr complex of the "poeta dolorosus". This attitude results in two apparently antithetical tendencies: a cry for the dominance of brute life and abstractionism, which banishes the personal and emotional life. The vision of the new man departs from the concept of fellow man, a suffering creature in need of sympathy and love. The regeneration of man is advocated in a large variety of ways, through art, through religion, through sympathy, through suffering, through political and social activism. The vehicles are dream plays, parabolic, allegorical and station dramas. In the Messianic phase of expressionism the poet turns leader and prophet, one who gives vision to the masses, who in turn provide him with a community. In the late phase of expressionism the poet (or his hero) realizes that the conversion which made him an activist was insufficient or wrongly directed, and a gap between him and the masses is discerned. The play's hero ends either in total nihilism if the new man attributes all guilt to humanity or in a genuine second conversion if he searches for the cause of failure within himself. Hand in hand with this disillusionment goes the disenchantment of many former Communists. Some expressionists suddenly found that they "did not have to break the old vessels but could fill them with new wine." In Sokel's opinion expressionism sought to be two things in one: a revolution of poetic form and a reformation of human life. In the end, the ethical and the aesthetic elements clashed, divorced and brought the movement to a rapid quietus.

This short and necessarily insufficient flight over some of the salient features of Sokel's book may indicate that it is exhilaratingly full of ideas. This is not to imply that Mr. Sokel does not use facts to back up his theories. But on occasion he contemplates the land below him from an especially high mountain top and makes rather sweeping statements without bothering to see some details which might contradict his theory. Some of his ideas (including much of the chapter entitled "The Impotence of the Heart") would apply to the literature of the time and not simply this school. Occasionally the author reads a great deal of autobiography into a play, as in the case of *Unruh* or *Ehrenstein*. But on the whole it is an admirable and most provocative book for both scholars and laymen.

FRANK D. HIRSCHBACH

Alan S. Downer. *Recent American Drama*. University of Minnesota pamphlets on American writers, No. 7, 1961. 46 pp., \$0.65.

What is "recent" American drama? Mr. Downer marks a convenient and conventional boundary line after World War II, yet, naturally, he finds it hard to keep it. Citing a "recent" phenomenon in American theatre like the emergence of the director as "artistic dictator," Mr. Downer must trace it to the Thirties; and the late plays of O'Neill and Hellman, singled out by him as outstanding in today's theatre, are testaments and postludes to careers of previous decades. Thus the nature of the topic, presumably chosen by the editors of the series, is not too happy. The subject is too broad for a pamphlet of this size. One defect is that the author often is forced to state his points dogmatically and must avoid any "yes, but . . ." discussion of his views in order to clarify and, ultimately, to strengthen them. The other defect, already noted, is the often false boundary line of the topic. Hemingway and Wolfe merited individual works in the series. Williams, at least, among the "recent" dramatists, does not deserve less, even if because of his interesting failures. Hemingway and Wolfe also have often had greater interest aroused in them because of their failures and limitations, rather than their successes.

In order to evaluate American drama, it is necessary to understand the demands that Broadway places upon its playwrights. Mr. Downer introduces his readers to the problems. He points out that the Broadway audience is not a community audience. Therefore, its common ground of interest and understanding can be only that of an elementary, a family relationship and its problems. Mr. Downer shows how the production of a Broadway play is a precarious investment in real estate, and he demonstrates how the playwright, increasingly ignorant of the technical devices of play-production, becomes subordinated to the "artistic dictator." The need to produce an unquestionable success at the box office forces the producer to demand from his playwright works that are largely shallow, complimentary, sometimes shocking but not accusing images of the audience in its domestic life. Even the so-called successful playwright must work according to this formula, although he may be bold and use it only as his point of departure.

Mr. Downer mentions MacLeish's *J. B.* and Paul Gregory's reading productions as two attempts to break away from the "conventions of social realism" now dominating American drama. To this "social realism" the larger part of the pamphlet is devoted. Mr. Downer is correct in noting that the "common man," the hero of this type of drama, becomes more and more common, that his decisions and actions are excused as those of an amoral subconsciousness, and that many of the latest American plays are nothing but a doctor's case studies of neurotics. "The dramatization of a case history is a new way of making the selected atom in the mass of compelling interest to the audience-complex," writes the author. He notes the case histories in the plays of Laurents and Nash, but his conclusions omit the moral consequences of the plays. In these social plays, which often depict offenses against law and soul that would have left Ibsen speechless, one can find the ultimate in sympathy but no judgment. The audience that hates its mother-in-law or, better, its mother, but does not dare to harm her, can see her killed on the stage and note that the killer is no villain but a wretch whose dark, inner forces for

once overcame his basically goody-goody nature. Such are the products of dream-factories much more significant, in a negative sense, than the busy hands that used to turn out Old Heidelberg operettas. The audience, congratulating itself on being interested in "social problems," has "compelling interest" in this type of drama because it sees itself white-washed in it. One pays willingly for such a loving forgiveness of sins, and an increasing number of Broadway plays is written according to this, as Eric Bentley has called it, "how to write an audience" rule. It would have been gratifying to see Mr. Downer emphasize this point.

The heroes of Mr. Downer's pamphlet, not surprisingly, are Inge, Williams, and Miller. He characterizes Inge as a transformer of popular American myths, Williams, "the most daring, spectacular, and fecund of the post-war dramatists," as a "gothic" playwright, and Miller as a social critic. Mr. Downer thinks that Inge is the "most traditional" of these playwrights. Inge's reworking of the myth of the beautiful blonde and the football hero in *Picnic* and the transformation of a number of myths in *Bus Stop*, however, have a dramatic honesty and validity which in the long run — assuming that Inge stays with this approach and extends it — may be more beneficial to American drama than the "messages" of more spectacular undertakings. It certainly is social realism in a good sense, and in purifying social myths Inge may do for American drama what in English (or is it Irish?) drama not very long ago was done by Shaw and Synge. Unfortunately, Mr. Downer is correct in his observations that in *A Loss of Roses* a year ago Inge has abandoned his former dramatic honesty.

Williams is not an easy playwright to deal with, and Mr. Downer, realizing this, has chosen to be respecting and careful rather than crushingly analytic. However, his accounts of the plays are good, and his metaphor that equates the theatrical world of Williams with an old map, which is

hedged in around the edges by unknowable seas blown upon by strange death's-heads out of the mapmaker's terrified imagination: cancer on the north, mutilation on the south, human mob on the east, mendacity in the west,

is as correct as it is imaginative. Mr. Downer thinks that not only the subject matter of Williams' plays but also their structure is gothic, "like the opening and shutting of a series of doors," a tightly connected chain of miniature plays within a play, containing "the highly articulate cries of shattered souls."

Miller's works, by contrast, are undivided in their scope and problems, and their point of view is direct and unqualified. This directness sometimes, as in *The Crucible*, can weaken a play and sometimes, as in *Death of a Salesman*, can make it strong. Mr. Downer has carefully observed that the simple moral dictum of being true to oneself by being true to the correct social goals is the theme that unifies Miller's works. Self-knowledge is lacking if an understanding of social responsibility and consequences is lacking, and the unfortunate heroes of *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* lose the love of their families because they are false to the larger family, the human society. Mr. Downer shows how society punishes these heroes and reminds us that, unlike the "case study" dramatists, Miller can both pity them and think that their punishment is deserved.

Mr. Downer's conclusions about American drama today are mildly optimistic. He attempts to excuse the recent "lean years" in American theatre,

remarking that among the whole output of Greek and Elizabethan theatre, also, the successful works are few. This, of course, is true, but the author has also noted the recent failure of Inge and the six-year silence of Miller, the failure of the playwrights of promise. In addition, the exterior demands of Broadway stated earlier by Mr. Downer are becoming heavier for the uncompromising playwright. Mr. Downer ends his essay by hailing *Long Day's Journey Into Night* as one bright work in today's American theatre; but this play is yesterday's belated contribution. It seems that the uncompromising playwright, if he remains uncompromising and imaginative, will in future try to live without Broadway. Thus the Off-Broadway movement that already has produced one Edward Albee may become the outstanding cradle of new American drama. It is, therefore, unfortunate that Mr. Downer has completely ignored the present and the potential importance of Off-Broadway. The reader, however, does gain from the essay a clear picture of present conditions in the Broadway theatre, and many of Mr. Downer's comments on present Broadway playwrights — Inge, Williams, and Miller in particular — are sensitive and valuable.

JANIS KLAVSONS

Max Bluestone & Norman Rabkin, eds., *Shakespeare's Contemporaries: Modern Studies in English Renaissance Drama*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961. xviii, 300 pp., \$3.00

The fortunes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists have been uneven. These writers have been neglected, apotheosized, damned, and embedded in the amber of learned articles. At the close of the nineteenth century, for example, Shaw, rebelling against the enthusiasm of Lamb, Hazlitt, and Swinburne, dismissed Shakespeare's contemporaries as "ruffianly pedants" who were "dehumanized specialists in elementary blank verse." Shaw continued: "Nothing short of a statue at Deptford to the benefactor of the human species who exterminated Marlowe, and the condemnation of Mr. Swinburne to spend the rest of his life in selling photographs of it to American tourists, would meet the poetic justice of the case. We are not all, happily, victims of the literary aberration that led Charles Lamb to revive Elizabethanism as a modern cult. We forgive him his addiction to it as we forgive him his addiction to gin."

The thirty-three essays that Messrs. Bluestone and Rabkin have collected in *Shakespeare's Contemporaries* do a good job of looking closely at the playwrights that Shaw glanced at so wittily. After reading Shaw's charge we know something about Shaw, but little or nothing about Marlowe, Chapman, Webster, etc.; after reading *Shakespeare's Contemporaries* we know a good deal about these authors and their plays. There are, for instance, essays on the double-plot in Greene (William Empson) and in Jonson (Jones Barish) that

help us see the structure of the plays more clearly; what may have been thought irrelevancies are now seen to have their places in the works.

I do not see how the editors could have produced a better collection within 300 pages. They decided to focus on plays rather than on topics and have included an essay (or several essays) on all the plays likely to be covered in a course in Renaissance drama. They have not included essays devoted to, say, the influence of Seneca, or the soliloquy, but many such topics get treated in the discussions of one play or another. For some plays the editors were not faced with abundant material, and the choice must have been fairly easy, but for others the possibilities were numerous, yet the decisions — which must have been difficult — are thoroughly satisfying. Take the essays on *Doctor Faustus*. The editors have given us three: Arthur Mizener's, from *College English*; W. W. Greg's, from *Modern Language Review*; and M. M. Mahood's, from *Poetry and Humanism*. One might ask where is Levin's chapter from *The Overreacher*, but the question evaporates when one realizes that another chapter from *The Overreacher* is used (along with an essay by Irving Ribner) to elucidate *Edward II*. Again, given the limitations of space, I cannot envision a better collection of essays on Renaissance plays.

As the previous paragraph indicates, the material has been chosen from journals as well as books. Most of the essays are later than 1940, but a few are of the '20's and '30's. The editors have looked widely: they have a portion of Wolfgang Clemen's newest book (thus beating, I think, the publication date of the translation of Clemen's entire book), and they have made their own translation of Louis Gillet's pages on *Arden of Feversham*. Alfred Harbage's introductory comments had not, of course, been previously published.

Bluestone and Rabkin have placed students further in their debt by attaching carefully selected bibliographies. These vary in length from three items on *Cambises* (a fourth, the best, is included in the collection) to dozens of items on Marlowe.

I know of no single book that equals this one in helping students understand the achievements of Shakespeare's contemporaries in the theater. Similarly, I know of no single book (E. K. Chambers' *Elizabethan Stage* is four volumes) that will save the teacher of Elizabethan drama as much leg-work as this; at last he can have on his shelf many of those essays that he has repeatedly had to prowl the stacks to read.

SYLVAN BARNET

Barry Ulanov, ed., *Makers of the Modern Theatre*. McGraw-Hill, 1961. v, 743 pp., \$6.50

Randolph Goodman, ed., *Drama on Stage*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961. xi, 475 pp., \$6.50

Makers of the Modern Theatre contains a number of plays seldom found in current anthologies. In addition to the standard writers — Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekov, Hauptmann, Shaw, Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, Pirandello, Lorca, O'Neill, Williams, and Miller — one finds Toller, Betti, Giraudoux, Anouilh, De Montherlant, Marcel, and Ionesco. It is good to see the work of the much misunderstood De Montherlant, for instance, of considerable importance in France but little known to English-speaking publication and production. Likewise Gabriel Marcel, whose work has been largely neglected in America and England. However, the translation of his *Ariadne* which is included is of doubtful service to his reputation. The stilted dialogue reminds one of the worst passages in Archer's rendering of Ibsen. Two rather bizarre short pieces, *Sodom and Gomorrah* and *Song of Songs*, represent Giraudoux. His usual theatrical facility and polish are perhaps more successful in such short pieces than in his longer plays, where these assets sometimes exhaust themselves in display and cleverness. Included also are Ugo Betti's remarkable *The Queen and the Rebels* and Toller's *Hoppla! Such Is Life*, which seems rather old fashioned. Yet its irony and pessimism make it more durable than much of the propagandistic expressionism written in the same period.

Mr. Ulanov supplies helpful notes on each of the playwrights included. He has drawn on important critical views and makes telling reference to documents and movements in the theatrical world. He takes special care to refer to the playwrights' own explanations and justifications of their works. But in the notes one finds no clear presentation of the continuity of drama in the contemporary theatre and in the larger setting of contemporary thought. When one claims that a "pattern of revolt" is the only fixed and lasting pattern in the modern theatre, a cogent framework is difficult to establish, but it is not impossible. The suggestion in Mr. Ulanov's introduction that every revolt has a common concern to put a larger degree of reality on stage leads to a rather unsatisfactory discussion of technique. The failure to come to grips with the problem of technique, in turn, produces seeming inconsistencies in discussing individual plays and playwrights. For instance, it is suggested that it is *easy* to come to terms with the theatre of Ionesco. This is true if we are concerned only with getting *used to* the quick shifts in convention, the bizarre characters and situations — the *new* expressionism. But once these surface difficulties are penetrated, the audience must deal with a greater difficulty — a devastating attack on its very foundations. To be sure Ulanov recognizes this kind of discomfort and identifies Ionesco, Genêt, Adamov, *et al* with Artaud and "the theatre of cruelty," but he seems to shy away from identifying the full measure of that cruelty which is *the degree of reality* in most serious contemporary theatre.

Randolph Goodman's anthology, *Drama on Stage*, includes suggestive explorations of the theatrical implementation of the texts included. A wide variety of notes, based mostly on interviews, accompanies each play. The role

of the designer, the actor, the director, the translator, etc., is discussed, usually by the particular artist involved. Some of these brief essays are charming and decorative, but not especially important in helping the reader to create the play in his mind and imagination. Others provoke real insight into the meaning of the play and its theatrical life. Maurice Valency's essay on translating *The Visit* presents a revealing insight into specific and general problems of translation. A perceptive actress such as Jessica Tandy discusses Blanche in *Streetcar Named Desire*, giving not only the approach she made to her role, but also a suggestive lead to the analysis of the play as a whole. Mr. Goodman's purpose is to supplement the play texts with materials that will catch, in Molière's phrase, "the meaning of the business on stage." Frequently they do just that, but sometimes they are diverting and lead away from the business of real understanding. To assert that a play only comes into its full life when the text is rendered in stage images by actors, designers, etc. is not to deny that wrong production may be more false than plain reading. And so it may be with a superfluous or wrong discussion of production. But the book does present a lively picture of the conflicting and contradictory forces at work in the contemporary theatre as a whole and should be considered not as six plays supplemented by notes, but as a general introduction to the theatre with six plays added for easy reference.

The plays included are *Medea* (Frederick Prokosch's translation), *Everyman* (The Hofmannsthal version), *Macbeth*, *The Misanthrope* (English verse by Richard Wilbur), *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *The Visit* (adapted by Maurice Valency).

One could dispute the choice of plays in each of the anthologies, especially if they are to be used as introductions either to modern drama or to the theatre as a whole. If one is to speak of the *makers* of modern theatre, how can he leave out Eliot or Claudel? Why are there examples of both Giraudoux and Anouilh, but no Sartre? Where is an example of the young playwrights who are right now re-making the English stage (Osborne, Behan, Whiting, etc.)? And where is Brecht?

If one is to demonstrate *drama on stage* with only six plays to represent "important traditional types", he perhaps ought to admit defeat at the outset. But one assumes that Mr. Goodman's volume is only an introduction to many plays. However, the reason *Streetcar Named Desire* is chosen as more *typical* than *Ghosts* or *The Cherry Orchard* is vague. And how can *The Visit* be justified as a *typical* departure from modern realism?

But such disputation is little more than a parlor game. One accedes to personal editorial preference and even to a measure of the arbitrary. And one must admit the limitations imposed by copyright, translation, and space on every editorial undertaking. Both volumes enrich our steadily growing library of plays, and one might hope that they would contribute to an enlargement of our theatrical repertoire.

JAMES R. CARLSON

J. L. Styan. *The Elements of Drama*. Cambridge University Press, 1960. 306 pp., \$4.75

Professor Styan, staff tutor in literature and drama at the University of Hull, England, has written a primer for the theater which contains some significant insights and some illuminating examples of how both literature and the theater operate.

The volume is an avowed attempt to reconcile drama as literature with theater as a plastic art; the task is a hopeless one but the paths Styan has chosen are interesting and provocative, if not entirely fresh or original. While there can be no argument with his statement that we must look "first to the structure of idea and emotion in the dialogue itself, how the actor is to embody it in speech and action, and the sort of work the audience must do before the play is created in their minds," the task is an untenable one, and the author emerges as a far more competent literary critic and analyst than he does as a theater practitioner.

Within its limits, however, the volume should be profitable both for the student of the drama and the theater buff. The three parts of the book deal with the elements which go to build "events" on the stage (The Dramatic Score), the way these may be put together (Orchestration), and the reaction of the playgoer (Values).

Using this skeleton, Styan proceeds with an elaboration of his approach. Fortunately, while he cannot quite come to grips with theater as a living art involving nuances of interpretation and physical fact, he is aware that there is a "something more" which separates dramatic literature from all other kinds of literature.

Styan's emphasis within the book (and implied by his choice of examples) may be summed up as weighing heavily on the "value" of verse qualities in the drama, the shifting impressions of written (and spoken) word, the element of time which shapes theater as an art with a fourth dimension, the various behavior of words upon the stage, and what he terms the "line of intention" as a gauge for judging the value of the play.

His examples are well-selected, pertinent, and clear for the most part, and they have the added value of introducing some relatively unfamiliar but important writers such as Denis Johnston to our attention. It is a pity, however, that while the book is crystal clear in its style, it smacks of a series of well-outlined lectures for the classroom.

There are two glaring shortcomings to the book: first, Styan seems to either misunderstand or undervalue the importance of Brecht and the Alienation Effect, and this lapse may be the result of having only read Brecht's plays and critical theory without ever having seen a production of, say, *Mother Courage* on the stage; second, he totally ignores the potential and the real theatrical excitement generated by the current rash of *avant garde* playwrights with their "Where's Floogle Street" cross-hatch drama. These shortcomings seem to indicate that Styan is either unaware of or not interested in the theater as it really is operating on the stage, and that he has narrowed his vision to only the accepted literary figures from Shakespeare to Eliot as if that body constituted the whole of modern theater.

ARTHUR H. BALLET

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